



WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 05

Mao Ni

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Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

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Synopsis

To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

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Chapter 401 - The Final Move (II)

Mo Yu asked, "Why do you need Wofu Zhexiu to open his mouth?"

Zhou Tong replied, "Because no one believes that Chen Changsheng would work with the demons. Although the death of that Mount Li disciple could make people uncertain, it's not enough to shake their faith, unless Zhexiu admits that they had done something together."

As the youngest Principal of the Orthodox Academy in history, in the view of many people, Chen Changsheng was highly likely to become the next master of the Li Palace, the next Pope—in this world, there was no more glorious future. It was simply impossible for the demons to provide anything better, so there was naturally no basis for him to betray humanity and collude with the demons.

Mo Yu silently pondered this, then asked, "Do you believe it?"

Putting aside what sort of opinion the entire continent had of Zhou Tong, putting aside how cruel and terrifying Zhou Tong's methods were, everyone had to admit that in the field of interrogation, Zhou Tong was unrivaled.

"To believe or not has never been important. The most important thing is evidence." Zhou Tong continued, "So I will give that wolf youth another month of time. In truth, that month is also for me."

Seeing his calm and serene eyes, Mo Yu asked, "Even if the army

is very interested in this matter?"

The corners of Zhou Tong's lips perked, which could be considered laughing for him. "Do you think I care?"

Mo Yu said a little mockingly, "I've always doubted whether, besides the Empress, you would actually care about anything else."

Zhou Tong did not respond to these rather rude words. Changing the subject, he said, "In fact, there are some very interesting people and concerns that I care quite a lot about. For example, that Mount Li disciple that died. If it weren't already confirmed that he really has died, I really would have liked to make him my successor."

Mo Yu's expression was a little odd. "Why?" she asked.

"It's very rare that I see someone so filled with self-loathing. If he hates himself so much, then presumably he really has no love for this world. And this, is precisely a pre-requisite to be my successor."

It was only natural that Zhou Tong had no love for this world, not even a hint of compassion. "Moreover, Liang Xiaoxiao's judgment of the big picture and his inferences on the situation were exceptionally precise. He clearly understood that not even his own death was enough to drag Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu into the abyss, hence the act he played outside the Garden of Zhou right before his death. He clearly divided Mount Li and the capital into two lines. His entrapment of Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu was just something he could easily do on the way, but his true target

was Mount Li, it was Su Li. Of course, it was also that little girl called Qi Jian."

Hearing Zhou Tong's words, Mo Yu suddenly felt somewhat cold. It turned out that Zhou Tong had known everything, understood everything. He knew Qi Jian was Su Li's daughter, knew of the enmity in Liang Xiaoxiao's heart, and knew that this had all been a plot.

"You've actually known all this the entire time..." She stared into Zhou Tong's eyes.

Zhou Tong paid her no attention and continued, "Many people require that Chen Changsheng is colluding with the demons. Liang Xiaoxiao used the final move of the Mount Li Sword Style to kill himself. This truly is amazing."

Mo Yu asked, "Then what do you think? Didn't you say that you cared about evidence the most?"

Zhou Tong silently thought for a few moment, then suddenly said, "Chen Changsheng's teacher is Daoist Ji. As for the relationship between Daoist Ji and Black Robe, no one knows, so why can't Chen Changsheng collude with the demons? In addition, Chen Changsheng is still alive. Since the Garden of Zhou is already no more and no one saw him come out the front gate despite all the people there, just how did he leave the Garden of Zhou? Some other door? Don't forget, only Black Robe knows where the Garden of Zhou's other door is."

Mo Yu was silent for a very long time. Finally, she said, "Originally, you really were suspecting him."

Zhou Tong stood up and walked to the doorway of the main hall. Gazing out into the vast sky of stars in the night, he said, "The accusation made with Liang Xiaoxiao's death is very powerful. By lucky coincidence, many people in the capital need Chen Changsheng to be colluding with the demons. By lucky coincidence, Chen Changsheng's ability to leave the Garden of Zhou indicates that he might be colluding with the demons. So it's only natural that I want to find out if he's really colluding with the demons or not."

Mo Yu walked behind and said with a hint of warning in her voice, "His Holiness will trust him."

Zhou Tong's expression suddenly became somewhat strange. "If the Pope will still insist on trusting him in this sort of situation, then is the Pope deserving of trust anymore?"

Mo Yu suddenly felt that the sinister Qi arising from below the courtyard in front of them had come to pervade the air around them. The atmosphere around their bodies became abnormally cold. In this sort of situation, she didn't know what else there was to say.

"You should first make clear just what the Empress thinks about this."

"Then, what do you think?"

Zhou Tong held his hands behind him as he looked up into the night. His voice was like the air after rain, and his slim figure seemed somewhat melancholy in the night. He really seemed like some grief-ridden poet.

"Me? Think about what?"

"What you think about Chen Changsheng."

"Do you want to die?" Mo Yu angrily shouted.

Zhou Tong's expression did not change at all. He flatly said, "On that day when the news that Chen Changsheng is alive was relayed to capital, it was rumored that the flowers of the Orange Garden bloomed in the middle of the night. It seems that your mood is not bad."

The anger in Mo Yu's eyes became murderous.

Zhou Tong did not turn around, almost like he didn't feel her stare.

Mo Yu left, and Zhou Tong began to take a walk.

The entire capital and even the entire continent knew that Zhou Tong did not like much, besides walking and personally torturing someone.

He was strict when treating others, and was even more so with himself. He had never indulged himself in sensual desires, much less abandoned all restraint, even in his youth. He lived a very disciplined and strict lifestyle, which could also be described as dry and monotonous. Of course, he also wrote poems, poems that expressed his grief and concern for the country. He also wrote memorials to the emperor, essays on how old ministers were plotting against the country. He lived his life like a great scholar. Before the Divine Empress, he would absolutely not be one of those ministers that slandered others, but rather a minister that would frankly speak his mind. Moreover, he was the least corrupt official in the history of the Great Zhou Dynasty, because he was in no way lacking money and also because nobody dared to bribe him.

In the Zhou Courtyard, Zhou Tong had raised fifteen black-colored Cerberuses. This sort of powerful monster which could only be found deep in the land of demons possessed a terrifyingly abnormal appearance and was also incredibly skilled in scouting and fighting. The black saliva that flowed down from its mouth could corrode even the firmest of metals. It was most likely for precisely this reason that Lord Zhou Tong had never been corroded by money—those who wanted to bribe him could never approach his home. If they attempted to sneak into his Zhou courtyard, they would become food for those black Cerberuses. Many human bones lay in the fields and forests surrounding his home.

In the late hours, ten-odd Cerberuses stood in the night. The black skin shining under the light of the oil lamp, when also illuminated by the starlight, gave off a very weird sensation. Under the claws of these black demon dogs was a prison.

Zhexiu was jailed in this prison. Fifty-five extremely fine metal chains passed through his body. His skin was covered in blood, dried and fresh. In many places, it was even possible to make out eerie white bone.

After an unknown span of time had passed, he woke up. Feeling the outside air that came through the air vent, he somewhat painfully lifted his head. He looked over at that place and hurriedly took in a few breaths.

It was possible to see a little bit of the night sky through that air vent, along with a few stars. He opened his eyes and looked at that place, as if he was somewhat greedily taking in the sight. The truth of the matter was that he actually couldn't see a single thing.

In the depths of his pupils was a smear of lemony yellow.

That was the color resulting from the Peacock Plume poison mixing with his blood.

It was somewhat sour.

Chapter 402 - The Night Within His Fingers

Liang Xiaoxiao had died. The accusation that he made before his death naturally was incredibly powerful, but the only other witness to this event in the Garden of Zhou—Zhuang Huanyu—besides giving an extremely concise explanation of the situation, had for the vast majority of the time maintained his silence, so the story given by the deceased was missing many details. When paired with the fact that the target of Liang Xiaoxiao's testimony was no ordinary person, this case concerning the Garden of Zhou had very naturally fallen into a quagmire. After several weeks, there had still been no progress.

Chen Changsheng's status was exceptionally unique, so the great powers within the Li Palace would definitely be keeping a close watch over this case. In the Grand Examination, the people had already noticed that the relationship between Zhexiu and the Orthodox Academy was rather good. Moreover, in the snowy plains of the north, this wolf youth had achieved enormous military merit, receiving the profound appreciation of several of the Great Zhou Army's Divine Generals. As for how this matter would develop, many people felt that it would ultimately depend on the Divine Empress's decision. For this reason, the Zhou Courtyard had become the focus of countless attentive gazes, because this was the residence of Zhou Tong. The will of the Divine Empress had always expressed itself through this most crazed, most ruthless, wild dog. It was also because after the Imperial Court had taken Zhexiu away from the Li Palace, he had been kept there.

Few people knew that the legendary Zhou Prison, that prison which could cause countless distinguished ministers and military officers to lose themselves in fear upon hearing the name, was

actually the same building as Zhou Tong's official residence. They were separated from each other by only some ten-odd zhang and two flimsy doors that seemed like they could be blown over by a strong wind. 'A fine time and beautiful scenery, helpless days.' This saying was precisely about Zhou Tong's residence and Zhou Tong's prison. The former had the unceasing beauty of the four seasons, and the latter helpless days, no way out and inability to see the blue sky.

The black rhino dragged a heavy metal carriage, passing through the stone arch of the Zhou Courtyard and coming to the sinister building before it.

Although the distance was so short, Zhou Tong still habitually used his carriage.

Besides when he was in front of the Divine Empress, only when he was in his metal carriage did he feel safe.

The black rhino carriage pulled up to the tunnel that provided entrance to the prison. With a squeak, the door of the carriage slowly opened.

Zhou Tong walked slowly out of the metal carriage, subconsciously looking up into the night sky. Under starlight, his face seemed somewhat pale.

The second he walked out of the carriage, the guard around the Zhou Prison suddenly increased by several levels. As for the shadows under those nearby eaves, it was unknown how many

cultivator experts were concealed within.

Zhou Tong was no weakling. He was a Star Condensation expert, one of the few experts of the Zhou Imperial Court. Even so, he still lived very cautiously. Unless an investigation required it, he would very rarely leave the Zhou Prison. Even when he left, in the vast majority of cases, it was only to go the Imperial Palace. Moreover, each time he left, he would bring countless imperial bodyguards. This was because he clearly understood that countless people wanted to kill him. If one were to rank people by how many people wanted them dead, Su Li would definitely rank behind him.

Reaching that cold and gloomy prison cell, he looked at the mangled body of the wolf youth—not even a single part of his body had been left intact. Zhou Tong's appearance did not change, nor did he show any of that perverted excitement of the rumors. There was only calm.

Ever since he had accepted the Divine Empress's command and taken charge of the Department for Purging Officials, Zhou Tong had interrogated countless prisoners and personally carried out countless tortures. He didn't even know how many people in conditions more miserable than Zhexiu's he had seen, so it wasn't possible for him to be moved by this scene. But he did not believe that he had become numb, and he also would not permit himself to grow numb to these bloody scenes. He insisted on the belief that only by protecting his initial mindset as he worked would he continue to preserve that sense of interest and freshness, and it was only through this that he could maintain his sharp sense for many things.

Yes, Zhou Tong had always believed this to be just a job. Originally, he had studied the holy books, but the essays he wrote were poor, so he switched to cultivation. His talent in cultivation was not bad, but because he was too old, he did not have the opportunity to enter the inner sects of those monasteries and sects to learn. For this reason, he began to engage in networking. Finally, in the Hundred Herb Garden, he had become acquainted with the Divine Empress and obtained this job. When doing something, you must love it and earnestly do your best, whether studying the holy books, cultivating Daoist rituals, or right now, torturing the people of the world—Zhou Tong had always required this of himself. The facts were proof that he had truly accomplished this.

"At six-fifteen, you fell unconscious from pain. By my estimate, you should have woken up from the pain by now, so I have come to ask you again: if those two women were Demon Princess Nanke's two wings, why did they not work together with the Demon General couple and directly kill you? On the contrary, why did they work separately, and in the end, give you a chance to divide and conquer?"

Zhou Tong did not stand in front of Zhexiu and stare into his eyes to pressure him, nor did he look at the file on the table.

He stood at the prison cell's only air vent, quietly looking up at the stars in the night sky and appearing somewhat absentminded.

The file on the table consisted of statements Zhexiu had made to Mei Lisha while on the road, but after Zhexiu was brought to the Zhou Prison, he hadn't said a single word more. Zhou Tong was

acutely aware that mental pressure meant nothing to this wolf youth. Zhou Tong had looked over the file once and had already memorized its complete contents, including those inconspicuous details. He felt it was just like Liang Xiaoxiao's dying words. Zhexiu's statement also had many suspicious points, but he still asked absentmindedly. He knew that there was no need to be so diligent since Zhexiu would still not admit anything.

He asked this question only because it was a part of his job, a procedure or a sequence. In his laws, it was a task that had to be performed—everything was part of the job. Only after concluding this portion could he move on to the next.

Hearing Zhou Tong's voice, Zhexiu finally responded. However, he still said nothing but rather just closed his eyes.

After he had returned to the capital from Hanqiu City, the Li Palace had sent a cardinal to personally treat his injuries. At the moment, the poison in his body had been mostly suppressed at the bottom of his eye. Although he still couldn't see, his condition would not worsen and his life was not in danger. He was not concerned about these problems, but rather about just what had happened in the Garden of Zhou. Why had the Garden of Zhou's sky collapsed? Were Nanke and those demon experts dead? Could Chen Changsheng also be dead? And also...had Qi Jian's condition improved? Was she still unconscious in her coma or had she woken up?

He concentrated his thoughts on these things, hoping to alleviate some of the pain. However, his face was getting paler and sweat drops the size of soybeans were continuously tumbling down his

forehead.

A very thin needle was inserted in the space between his eyebrows. The end of the needle was held in Zhou Tong's fingers as he softly twirled it.

Zhou Tong was very calm. He didn't seem like a torturer but rather like a doctor treating his patient.

Zhexiu's breaths became more hurried and his two eyebrows increasingly creased. His body began to fiercely shudder.

Those slender chains which ran through his body began to chafe against the flesh. Rotted flesh and tender, newly grown flesh alike were scraped off.

Zhou Tong lightly brushed against the end of the needle. Zhexiu had already bitten down so much that his mouth was full of blood, but he could no longer bear it. He painfully yelled out, his hoarse voice reverberating through the isolated and gloomy Zhou Prison.

He wanted to fall unconscious, but the pain made it impossible.

Life and death, pain and its alleviation: all of it was in Zhou Tong's fingers.

Mo Yu departed the Zhou Courtyard and headed back towards the Imperial Palace. As the wheels of the carriage rolled over the gray stones, it was somewhat bumpy.

She felt that if it were the Black Goat pulling the carriage, it would be fine. But the Black Goat did not like Zhou Tong and would never go with her to that place.

The carriage abruptly stopped.

She calmly looked at the curtain hanging at the front of the carriage and asked, "Your Highness, what do you plan to do?"

Luoluo's voice was clear and bright, just like the new leaves at the beginning of spring. "I want to tell you all that the fact that Teacher hasn't returned doesn't mean that the Orthodox Academy no longer has people."

Chapter 403 - To Have The Capability Does Not Mean One Is Useful

Mo Yu opened the curtain in front of her and walked out. She looked at that elegant and cute, and yet also completely noble, little girl and smiled. "Your Highness, I am very confused by your meaning."

Luoluo did not smile, but her eyes were still very bright. "You know my meaning. I want Zhexiu to return to the Orthodox Academy."

Mo Yu slightly raised her eyebrows, feigning perplexity. "Wofu Zhexiu...what does he have to do with the Orthodox Academy?"

Luoluo sincerely replied, "Zhexiu is a student of the Orthodox Academy."

Mo Yu calmly replied, "The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education has not recorded this. No one will admit it."

This was a very direct rebuttal. If the Orthodox Academy could not prove Zhexiu was a student, then no matter how respected Luoluo's status was, she still had no basis to place any pressure on the Great Zhou Imperial Court.

Luoluo stared into her eyes. "You clearly understand that I and my teacher will definitely protect him."

Mo Yu replied, "The Imperial Court emphasizes laws and decrees. Whether Zhexiu has committed a crime or not, he must at least be interrogated."

Luoluo asked, "Then did you ever think about how you plan to explain this to Teacher once he returns?"

Listening to these words, and then thinking about the words Zhou Tong had said to her, for some reason, Mo Yu became irritated. "And just why do I need to explain to Chen Changsheng? Can it be that I'm afraid of him!?"

Luoluo said, "Then why don't you quickly bring my teacher back?"

Mo Yu sneered, "The reason Chen Changsheng does not come back is because he wants to accompany Su Li. At present, the entire world wants to kill Su Li, but this idiot wants to protect Su Li! Just what does that have to do with me? And what does it have to do with the Empress? Your Highness seems to have the capability, so might as well let him recognize his own stupidity!"

These words were said very quickly, like pearls landing on a jade plate, their clear sounds ringing out without end. It was because she truly was very angry.

It was anger over his stubbornness, anger over his idiocy, anger over his failure to cherish his own life.

This 'his' naturally referred to Chen Changsheng.

Luoluo's eye continued to get brighter. Looking at her, she said, "If Teacher does not come back, he naturally has his reasons for not coming back. If you really are concerned about him, if you have the capability, just bring him back."

Mo Yu grew even more furious as she thought to herself, just why would I be concerned about Chen Changsheng's life or death? She declared, "Your Highness should know very well who is standing behind those people that want to kill Su Li in Xunyang City. If you have the capability, just have His Holiness withdraw his order!"

Luoluo gave her no more attention. She turned around and headed out of the Imperial Palace. Only her childish voice continued to echo, "In short, you think of a way. Or else, if you have the capability, don't get into my teacher's bedsheets anymore."

At these words, the edges of Mo Yu's cheeks blushed. Staring at the girl's back as she forcefully restrained her shame, she said, "Her Highness is still very young and seems to be quite concerned about these matters, but I certainly don't have that capability."

She said that she didn't have the capability, but when Mo Yu walked to the Dew Platform and saw the Divine Empress illuminated in the splendor of the Night Pearls lining the platform, she still couldn't help but want to open her mouth and say something. In the end, when she opened her mouth, she instead spoke about the encounter she just had. The Divine Empress listened to her then turned quiet for a few moments. Then she

said, "Just what's so good about that kid Chen Changsheng...to actually make Luoluo so nervous?"

Mo Yu lightly responded, "Presumably, Chen Changsheng still has some use."

The Divine Empress laughed. "Over the past few days, news has been constantly circulating around the capital that Chen Changsheng did not make it out of the Garden of Zhou, that his life might have already come to an end. When she heard this news, was she very broken-hearted?"

Mo Yu thought to herself, it wasn't something so simple as being broken-hearted. Just as she wanted to say something in passing, the Divine Empress suddenly turned her body and glanced at her. It was just a very simple glance, very understated and lacking in any sort of profound meaning. It was casual and even less asking about her relationship with Chen Changsheng, as Zhou Tong and Luoluo had done. And yet...her body suddenly cooled by several degrees.

When she heard the news that Chen Changsheng had died in the Garden of Zhou, her mood had not been quite right.

Of course, she did not cry. She just felt a little disappointed, her mood very frustrated, as if something had gone missing in her life. She knew that this sort of emotional response was very problematic. She was very worried that people would be able to see this problem of hers. Yet tonight, first it was Zhou Tong that asked, then it was Luoluo that brought it up, and now it was the Empress glancing at her.

Luckily, the Divine Empress did not do anything, only extended her hand and lightly caressed her smooth and exquisite cheeks. It was like she was playing with a cat or fiddling around with some beautiful object. Anyone could tell you that Mo Yu was a very beautiful woman, so beautiful that she was like a work of art.

The Divine Empress was rarely so intimate with others, even her own daughter, much less those sons that were already dead and their descendants that had been banished to the counties. In the past few years, Mo Yu was the only exception. On certain occasions, there were even some busybodies who would look at this relationship between the two supreme women of the Great Zhou Dynasty and see many romantic implications, but these sorts of conclusions were not spread too widely. This was because the Divine Empress's status was far too majestic, and also because the Divine Empress was also a very beautiful woman, even more beautiful than Mo Yu. From the time of Emperor Taizong, she had been acknowledged throughout the world as its supreme beauty.

"Chen Changsheng will not die."

The Divine Empress looked up at the millions of stars in the night sky, her expression very casual.

When Mo Yu heard these words, it was like she had heard the voice of an immortal. She instantly relaxed and walked over to the Divine Empress's side. Just like the times when her mood had been at its best, she lightly pulled on the Divine Empress's arm.

"Then what about Su Li? Will he die?"

It was only today at noon that the news of Su Li and Chen Changsheng's presence in Xunyang City was relayed to the capital, and Zhu Luo's appearance was not confirmed until the late evening. Su Li was a feared enemy of the demons and at the same time was also an opponent of the Great Zhou. Mo Yu would not show as much concern for his fate as she had for Chen Changsheng. She was just a little concerned because Su Li was no ordinary person. His death would have a high possibility of changing the entire situation on the continent. Just what did the Divine Empress think about this?

"What do I think...it is not important, because no one has ever asked me what I thought about this situation."

The Divine Empress stood at the edge of the Dew Platform, her two hands held behind her. Although her figure was clearly lithe and graceful, she gave a feeling of vastness that seemed like it could embrace the whole world. However, when she spoke at this time, her words seemed somewhat mocking and cold.

Mo Yu understood the Empress's meaning. When general Xue He took action, he had not obtained the Empress's order beforehand, but the entire continent took his action as the Divine Empress's intention—no matter if it was the old or new powers of the Zhou Dynasty, no matter if it was the Imperial Court or the Orthodoxy, there were far too many people that wanted Su Li dead, because the millions upon millions of the people of Zhou all shared one dream: the converging of the north and south and the unification of all under heaven.

"But...if he dies, he dies." The Divine Empress looked up at that star in the night sky that had shone for several centuries but had now grown abnormally dim. After a moment of silence, she continued, "Anyway, I also don't like Su Li. He and the world of humans...are too alienated from each other. What use is there in keeping him?"

Chapter 404 - A Sword About To Wake Up

In Xunyang City, there were currently only two parties with the qualifications, or perhaps the confidence, to oppose Zhu Luo's might. Those were Xue He with the Northern Zhou army and Hua Jiefu with the Orthodoxy branch. From Zhu Luo's appearance, the Li Palace's attitude was exceptionally clear. Now the Divine Empress had agreed that Su Li should die, so Su Li really was going to die, only...Zhexiu was still imprisoned in the Zhou Prison. Mo Yu found herself somewhat incapable of confirming just what the Empress thought of Chen Changsheng. In the end, she could not hold it back and raised up the doubt in her heart. "If Chen Changsheng persists in defending Su Li, what then?"

The Divine Empress calmly replied, "You must not forget what sort of person Zhu Luo is."

Of the four surnames of Tianliang, Liang Household had silently endured for a thousand years, and then in that great chaos ten-odd years ago, their spirit had been snatched away by Su Li's single sword. Although the present Liang Wangsun was very outstanding, it was already impossible to reconstruct the former magnificence of the Liang Household. The Wang clan was already half-collapsed. Its old mansions had long since become a stretch of ruins. Even with a person like Wang Po of Tianliang, they had still been compelled to move south. Only Zhu Luo had good relations with the old Imperial clan and was also extremely close to Mei Lisha. His moving against Su Li in Xunyang City, without even needing to ask, was assuredly the will of the Li Palace. As a matter of course, he would definitely not allow Chen Changsheng to die.

As for what if an accident occurred? The Storms of the Eight

Directions were exceedingly outstanding experts. After Su Li was heavily injured, Zhu Luo was the sole supreme existence in Xunyang City. He had complete grasp over the situation, so how could an accident occur? Mo Yu understood everything and only then did she truly relax. Gazing at the Empress's beautiful and dazzling profile, she thought to herself, and what about you?

Does the Empress want Chen Changsheng to live or to die?

Some people die in order to kill others, like Liang Xiaoxiao. Some people meet death in order to save others, like Chen Changsheng or Wang Po.

There was also someone who was doing their utmost to live so that they could help others live.

That person was Qiushan Jun.

When the clues about the Garden of Zhou had appeared on the continent, as the number one Ethereal Opening cultivator, Qiushan Jun received the plans of the Five Saints and entered some place. Under the encirclement of several demon experts at the same level of cultivation as him, he wrested away the key to the Garden of Zhou. For this affair, he had disappeared for many days, missing out on the opportunity to attend the Grand Examination and enter the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths. He also did not know that the Mount Li Sword Sect and the Qiushan clan were determined to visit the capital to propose. In addition, he had been heavily injured during this affair and it was difficult for him to completely recover. But this was all worth it, because the Garden of Zhou had landed in the hands of the

humans, because by encountering desperate straits, he had exploded with an unprecedented energy. The true dragon blood within him awoke once more, letting him successfully break through into Star Condensation in one go. Just like before, he had once again shocked the entire world.

Who could reach Qiushan Jun? Chen Changsheng had taken the first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination; in the Mausoleum of Books, he had attracted an entire night of starlight; together with Xu Yourong, they were the youngest upper level Ethereal Opening cultivators in history; but he still could not catch up to Qiushan Jun. There were some priests of the Li Palace as well as people like Tang Thirty-Six that thought about this differently. In their view, Chen Changsheng was still young and he had only cultivated for one year, yet he was able to reach such a level of cultivation. If he wanted to catch up to Qiushan Jun, it was something that would happen sooner or later, even so much that they believed that when Qiushan Jun was compared to Chen Changsheng, it had the feeling of the big bullying the small.

But the fact of the matter was that Qiushan Jun was still not yet twenty and he was younger than Gou Hanshi by one year. It was just that his true dragon blood and cultivating talent were too earthshaking, his conduct and bearing too perfect, and he had grown famous too early, up to the extent that Chen Changsheng's supporters and Qiushan Jun's worshippers alike forgot this fact.

To not yet be twenty and possess a Star Domain, just what sort of concept was this? This was a legend. As long as he could cultivate and live as tranquilly and courageously as he had in these past twenty years, then there was a high chance that he could become the second Su Li. No, in the view of countless people, he was more

earnest than Su Li, more trustworthy. The human world required even more his type of person.

But first, Qiushan Jun would have to survive.

Black Robe had disturbed that rainbow that crossed ten thousand li and had also caused Qiushan Jun's injuries to worsen. Soon after, in order to stabilize the rainbow, to reopen the Garden of Zhou as quickly as possible and let the human cultivators leave, Qiushan Jun had spent night and day incessantly pouring his true essence and the Qi in his blood into the rainbow, regardless of his severe injuries. When the main gate of the Garden of Zhou finally reopened, his mind relaxed a little. He could no longer endure and after closing his eyes, he fell into a deep sleep on the prayer mat.

He did not truly fall unconscious, but rather used a secret technique of the path of the sword that only he knew in all of Mount Li—Sword Rest.

When Martial Granduncle Su Li had taught him swordplay for one month, the first thing Qiushan Jun had been taught was Sword Rest. A person in Sword Rest looked just like he was in a coma. The difference lay in the fact that a person in Sword Rest could still hear noises from the outside. But because all of his true essence and essence blood had to be used to suppress and mend his injuries and clear his Dao heart, there could be no other differences. Even if a single drop of essence blood was used to maintain movement, even if he wanted to just move a finger, it would cause his injuries to completely break out. To describe it in another way, the current Qiushan Jun was like a blind and paralyzed youth on a bed.

The reason Qiushan Jun had so resolutely poured all his essence blood into the rainbow was that he was concerned about his fellow cultivators in the Garden of Zhou, and worried about Junior Sister Xu Yourong. It was also because he clearly understood that even though he was making his injuries worse, he only needed to maintain forty-nine days of Sword Rest to completely mend all his injuries.

At present, many days had already gone by.

The time when he would awaken from his Sword Rest was still several days away.

He wanted to wake up in advance. Even if he were to suffer heavy injuries, he still wanted to wake up.

Because for many days, many noises had been continuously transmitted into his ears.

There were cries of alarm, voices of concern, voices of discussion, and then once again cries of alarm.

Third brother...died? Liang Xiaoxiao...died? His Dao heart received a heavy blow. He was aggrieved to the extreme, and at the same angered to the extreme. Just who was it, just who dared to slay a fellow disciple of Mount Li! Just who dared to kill one my Seven Laws! Just who dared to kill my...junior brother!

But he could do nothing. He could only listen to the trembling voice of the Sect Master as well as the quiet voices that were gradually getting further away. In the dark world of the Sword Rest, Qiushan Jun gradually regained his calm and was faintly able to perceive that there was something wrong with this matter.

After some days had passed, Junior Brother Qi Jian was brought back. He was carried into the Sect Master's dwelling, right in the bed in front of him.

Right now, in the highest peak of the mountains of Mount Li lay two unconscious disciples.

Just who had done it? Just what had gone on in the Garden of Zhou? Qiushan Jun calmly and even callously pondered this. He was like a sword that was resting in its sheath, ready at any time to reveal its edge.

He closed his eyes and heard many names.

Zhexiu, Zhuang Huanyu...Chen Changsheng.

Was it like this?

So it was originally like this.

Chapter 405 - Mount Li In Chaos

Today in the dwelling at the peak of Mount Li, several more unconscious people were lying between Qiushan Jun and Qi Jian. Those wounds which had been very simply bandaged were still oozing blood, and the scene seemed rather bloody.

Outside the dwelling stood several dozen Mount Li disciples. Bai Cai stood at the very front, one hand supporting the Sect Master while the other held his sword. His face was somewhat pale, both because he was sick from the sight of blood and because his emotions were rather agitated. Of course, this agitation was not out of fear, even if he was sick from seeing blood, or else he definitely wouldn't be the real Bai Cai.

[This youth with the bizarre name](#) was a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect's inner sect, sixth law of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, in the later level of Meditation. The emotion currently agitating his chest was called anger.

(Bai Cai's name is literally 'cabbage' in Chinese.)

The Mount Li Sword Sect's Master had a very dignified expression, but his body was very weak. This supreme expert whose might once shook the south today found it quite the task to even stand up straight. Only with the assistance of a young disciple could he stand steady. The stone plaza and the mountain path outside the dwelling were both covered in blood and sword slashes. It was very obvious that an extremely bitter battle had just occurred.

In the early morning, several elders suddenly brought their

disciples with them to the main peak and requested that Qi Jian be turned over to the Discipline Hall for questioning. When the Mount Li Sword Sect Master rejected their proposal, a battle suddenly erupted. Those unconscious and heavily wounded people in the dwelling, as well as the bloodstains and shattered swords outside of it, were the bitter results of this battle.

"Absolutely shameless!" Bai Cai looked at Elder Xiao Songgong who stood at the head of the crowd. His grief and anger mixed with his rebuke. "You would actually dare conspire to harm the Sect Master! Could it be that you want to betray Mount Li!?"

At the moment, Gou Hanshi, Liang Banhu, and Guan Feibai were still at the capital in the Mausoleum of Books, comprehending the Dao. Qiushan Jun and Qi Jian were still heavily injured and in comas. Of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, only Bai Cai remained. The several second-generation martial uncles had all been imprisoned in the belly of the mountain, so it was he who stood in the front.

Although he was a junior disciple highly treasured and supported by the Mount Li Sword Sect, possessing a very special status, if this were any other time, he would definitely be extremely respectful and courteous to an elder like Xiao Songgong. He would not have dared to say such words as he had. However, he was truly extremely furious at the moment. If the Sect Master had not suffered an internal injury from the Garden of Zhou affair, then even if Xiao Songgong had launched a sneak attack, how could he have possibly dealt such a heavy injury? If those martial uncles had not been imprisoned by some secret technique in the sword array in the belly of the mountain by Xiao Songgong, these people would not have dared to bully their way to the peak.

The mountain breeze caressed Xiao Songgong's white eyebrows. The morning light shone upon his emotionless face. The normally transcendent feeling he gave off had been completely supplanted by a grim toughness. He sternly shouted back, "Just who is it really that is betraying Mount Li? We are just requesting that the Sect Master, in accordance with the iron law of Mount Li, turn over Qi Jian, the disciple suspected of colluding with the demons, to the Discipline Hall for questioning. Why do you not agree?"

Xiao Songgong stared at the pale face of the Mount Li Sect Master and said with hint of severity, "Can you tell us a reason?"

The Mount Li Sect Master looked back, his slightly dark eyes filled with an indifference and sadness that came from understanding everything. "Then can Senior Brother tell us a reason? Why did you use the secret technique left behind by Master to trap our fellow senior and junior brothers in the belly of the mountain just as they were preparing to use the sword array to travel north to save Junior Martial Uncle? Why is it that behind you stand our fellow Daoists from the Longevity Sect as well as... the clan head of the Qiushan clan? And also...why did you previously have to strike me with that palm?"

As he said these words, there was suddenly the sound of swords whistling through the air in the morning sun. Several dozen flying swords began to circle the summit where the dwelling was. As they flew speedily around, they drew out line after line of metallic light. This was a portion of Mount Li's Myriad Sword Array.

At the sight of these flying swords, all the people that had

followed Xiao Songgong up the mountain grew very grave. This included the upper level Star Condensation elder from the Longevity Sect as well as the venerable servant of the Qiushan clan whose strength was unfathomable. Only the head of the Qiushan clan acted like he had not noticed it.

Just how profound was the Mount Li Sect Master's cultivation! Even when he was heavily injured and unable to battle, his sword heart still existed. His words were like sharp swords, directly remonstrating others and leaving them powerless to respond. The two elders from the Discipline Hall that had always been standing behind Xiao Songgong suddenly looked ashamed. Even Xiao Songgong's expression went through several transformations before he finally turned to that elder from the Longevity Sect.

Just after Xiao Songgong had successfully launched his sneak attack, the Sect Master had consumed the last of his sword intent to summon a portion of the Myriad Sword Array. It protected the dwelling and simultaneously cut off this peak from all the other mountains of the Mount Li Sword Sect. The several Star Condensation second generation experts had all been imprisoned by Xiao Songgong's secret technique in the belly of the mountain. The Sect Master did not want the disciples of the other sects to come and attempt to save them only to be injured by Xiao Songgong's group. However, he had also activated the Myriad Sword Array's Thundercry sound amplification magic, so everything that was said on this peak could be heard by the rest of Mount Li.

If he could, Xiao Songgong would definitely have preferred to not answer the Sect Master's questions. However, in his current situation, if he wanted to smoothly grasp the authority of Mount Li

and convince the masses, he would absolutely have to give a convincing answer.

The Longevity Sect elder expressionlessly replied, "Why? Because we suspect that you are colluding with the demons!"

At these words, the Mount Li disciples standing at the Sect Master's side erupted in rage and couldn't hold back their curses. Bai Cai was even so angry that his entire face turned red. Even the hand gripping his sword began to tremble. It seemed like the sounds of cursing could even be heard from the nearby mountains.

The Mount Li Sect Master was noble and highly respected. He had a reputation for treating all his disciples fairly, and he was even famed in the entire south for his compassion. For this Longevity Sect elder to denounce him as colluding with demons, just how could the people stand this?

The ten-odd mountain peaks all flared up. Yet the only people on these peaks were some third-generation disciples as well as some outer sect disciples who had even lower cultivations. It was simply impossible for them to break through the Myriad Sword Array, so they could only incessantly curse.

That Longevity Sect elder's skin truly was extremely thick. His expression unchanging, he said, "Before Mount Li disciple Liang Xiaoxiao died, he accused Qi Jian of colluding with the demons, Wofu Zhexiu, and Chen Changsheng in instigating a mass slaughter in the Garden of Zhou. It was for this reason that Qiushan Jun has fallen into a coma. As Qiushan Jun's greatly respected teacher, just why have you procrastinated for so long,

not even willing to give Qi Jian over to the Discipline Hall for questioning? Just what are you trying to hide? Just how could anyone not suspect you of colluding with the demons?"

"Since when were the matters of my Mount Li the concern of the Longevity Sect?" The Mount Li Sect Master gazed at the Longevity Sect elder and said, "Don't say some nonsense like 'the Longevity Sect is the representative of all the sects and kingdoms of the south.' When Junior Martial Uncle killed off every last one of your Longevity Sect elders, did you still believe that my Mount Li would listen to you? Truly hopelessly naive."

With this statement, the ten-odd peaks of Mount Li resounded with thunderous laughter, and there were even more disciples who admired the Sect Master for his incisive commentary. Bai Cai and his fellow disciples roared in laughter. When paired with the ground covered in blood and swords, a heroic air spontaneously arose.

Xiao Songgong took notice that those disciples that were loyal to him and the two other elders looked rather uneasy. He couldn't help but inwardly feel some regret. He thought to himself, I was only thinking that Mount Li was a subordinate of the Longevity Sect, which is why I agreed to the Longevity Sect elder accompanying us. But I forgot that because of that incident ten-odd years ago, because of Su Li, the disciples of Mount Li completely lost any respect they had for the Longevity Sect. On the contrary, all they have is hostility.

"Regardless, Elder Jiang is still an elder of the same faction. Junior brother, you should still show some respect."

Xiao Songgong looked at the Sect Master and said coldly, "If you don't want people to think that you are colluding with the demons, then bring Qi Jian out. When the time comes, I will personally come to you to offer my deepest apologies, and then cut off my own arm and seclude myself in the back mountains for five hundred years!"

These words were extremely unyielding, actually causing the laughter and curses from the surrounding peaks to completely come to a halt. The Sect Master calmly gazed at Xiao Songgong and then sighed. He thought to himself, if you weren't already certain that I couldn't bring Qi Jian out, you wouldn't dare to swear such a fierce oath.

"Is it just this matter?" He looked into Xiao Songgong's eyes as he asked.

Xiao Songgong did not concede a single inch. Staring back into his eyes, he hatefully said, "Of course, you also have to hand over the Relic Sword! In addition, you also must hand over the Myriad Sword Array!"

The Sect Master calmly replied, "I must hand over everything, then presumably I must also hand over my position as Sect Master."

Xiao Songgong said nothing, this being his silent acknowledgment.

Bai Cai furiously said, "Just for what reason do you think Junior Brother is collaborating with the demons, that he would conspire with the Demon race?"

A Discipline Hall elder that had remained silent from the beginning suddenly opened his mouth. "The person who identified Qi Jian as colluding with the demons was not us, but rather your deceased third brother."

This Discipline Hall elder had an extremely prestigious reputation. He normally executed the law very strictly and was the most just and fair. All the disciples, without exception, admired him. At his words, even Bai Cai could find no words to respond. This being the case, the disciples of every peak were also silenced.

The Discipline Hall elder turned towards the Sect Master and sighed, "Just why do you insist on not allowing the Discipline Hall to question her?"

The Sect Master calmly answered, "Because I don't believe that Qi Jian would ever do something evil."

The Discipline Hall elder retorted, "Even when your other disciple Liang Xiaoxiao personally indicated it? In addition, he's already dead."

The Mount Li Sect Master grew quiet, and then replied, "Yes."

The Discipline Hall elder asked, "Since you don't believe it, why

won't you allow the Discipline Hall to investigate?"

The Mount Li Sect Master looked back at him and said nothing for a very long time. Finally, he said, "Because I do not trust the Discipline Hall."

A small clamor stirred within the mountains. Bai Cai and his fellow disciples had fought bravely and shed blood in order to protect the dwelling, but when they heard the Sect Master's words, even they dared not believe it. It must be known that the Discipline Hall of Mount Li was the most just. It had never done anything improper.

The Discipline Hall elder's eyebrows slightly trembled. It was obvious that he was very angry. He asked, "Might the venerable Sect Master instruct us, in the last hundred years, what has the Discipline Hall done that has been unjust. If there is none, then why do you not trust it?"

"Because you do not believe in Junior Martial Uncle," the Sect Master declared to the two Discipline Hall elders.

The Discipline Hall elder asked, "Why do you think this way?"

The Sect Master answered, "Back then when you two entered the Mausoleum of Books and swore blood oaths to become Monolith Guardians, Junior Martial Uncle was greatly enraged at this news. He burst into the Mausoleum of Books and forcefully dragged you away. Whenever the common people discuss this matter, they will always praise my Mount Li by saying that it acts like soothing wind

or bright moon. But I know very well that you two have always felt that you missed out on the opportunity to enter the Divine Domain because Junior Martial Uncle brought you out of the Mausoleum of Books. You have always felt that Junior Martial Uncle was being unfair to you."

This was an extremely famous event from the past. But it was only this morning that many Mount Li disciples learned that the two disciples that had been forcefully taken out of the Mausoleum of Books by the Martial Granduncle were actually these two iron-faced and selfless elders of the Discipline Hall.

The other Discipline Hall elder that had not spoken suddenly said in a hoarse voice, "Could it be that Junior Martial Uncle was not being unfair to us?"

The Sect Master said sorrowfully, "The Mausoleum of Books is a holy ground and also an abyss. It's been open for so many years, but how could you still not understand? Junior Martial Uncle did not hesitate to offend the Li Palace to give you two true freedom. And yet you've held grudges against him for so many years. It's truly preposterous!"

Chapter 406 - Chaos For Two Women (I)

The Discipline Hall elder expressionlessly responded to the Sect Master, "All matters ask about actions, not intentions, and to keep the law is just so. Regardless of what the Sect Master thinks of our views, according to the laws of Mount Li, disciple Qi Jian should be handed over to the Discipline Hall for questioning."

Bai Cai angrily replied, "Martial Uncle Hong, if all matters ask about actions and not intentions, then besides that glance from Third Brother before he died, just what wrongs has Junior Brother committed? Just what exactly did he do that he needs to be questioned by the Discipline Hall?"

Xiao Songgong looked at him and bitterly laughed, "Although Liang Xiaoxiao only glanced at her, he said what he needed to loud and clear. That wolf cub is the main culprit who collaborated with the demons to cause chaos in the Garden of Zhou. And inside the Garden of Zhou and even outside, at least several hundred pairs of eyes can clearly testify that Qi Jian was embracing that wolf cub and exchanging flirting glances. There's something between the two of them!"

The vast majority of people did not understand the meaning of Xiao Songgong's words, but the faces of those who knew Qi Jian's history abruptly changed. Not waiting for these people to say any words to stop him, Xiao Songgong shouted, "Qi Jian is Junior Martial Uncle's own daughter!"

The mountains erupted with noise!

"She is a woman, and yet she would actually fool around with this wolf-human hybrid, and even touch skin! Does she still want the face to stand for my Mount Li's good name? For what reason can't the Discipline Hall question her!"

Xiao Songgong's frigid and malicious voice echoed through the peak and was simultaneously transmitted through the array to all the other peaks. All the mountains were deathly silent, the Mount Li disciples too shocked to muster any words. Junior Brother Qi Jian...was actually a girl? And she was actually...Junior Martial Uncle's own daughter? Was this all true?

Xiao Songgong stared into the Sect Master's eyes and said derisively, "If she were not Junior Martial Uncle's daughter, how could you possibly cherish her as much as you do? What she wants, you give her. Haven't Hanshi and the rest encountered something like this? Even Qiushan—do you treat him as well as you do Qi Jian? Did you think I didn't know? You even want to give the position of Sect Master over to her!"

The disciples on the various peaks of Mount Li were even more stunned at these words. Bai Cai was very anxious and wanted to say something, but he was prevented from doing so by the Sect Master. The Sect Master shook his head at Xiao Songgong, his face revealing a faint sense of ridicule and sorrow.

He truly did particularly dote on Qi Jian, much more so than he did on Gou Hanshi and the others, and not even Qiushan could compare. But this was not because Qi Jian was Junior Martial Uncle's daughter. It was because she was his final disciple, and also because Qi Jian was a girl. It was such a simple reason, and the

Sect Master understood that Qiushan and the others all understood and accepted it. Thus, in the past several years, they had also doted on Qi Jian. He believed Xiao Songgong would also understand this, but would he listen to him right now?

Xiao Songgong would not cease his attacks just because of the Sect Master's silence. He looked at him and icily continued, "The position of the Mount Li Sword Sect Master is not yours to decide on! If you want to give it to Qi Jian, you must also see if we agree or disagree."

The Sect Master calmly looked back and asked, "Then in your view, who should occupy the position of Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect?"

Xiao Songgong coldly answered, "The position of Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect in the future should naturally belong to Martial Nephew Qiushan!"

This statement was extremely unyielding. All the disciples of all the mountains of Mount Li, even Bai Cai who was supporting the Sect Master, thought that this statement was only right and inevitable. The entirety of the Mount Li Sword Sect, and even the entirety of the world, had long since tacitly approved of this point.

"Talking back and forth, but we still only talk about the position of Sect Master." The Sect Master looked at Xiao Songgong and sighed, his eyes filled with pity and even sympathy. "Senior Brother, when will you learn to look a little farther?"

Because of the Sect Master's eyes, Xiao Songgong grew indescribably furious. He bellowed, "Could it be that you think I'm a person that clings to power and position? Could it be that you think that I rebelled for my own personal benefit!"

The Sect Master calmly smiled. "Perhaps it is because you are doing it for the benefit of all humanity."

Without a doubt, this was sarcasm.

Bai Cai who was supporting the Sect Master began to laugh, as did those several dozen blood-stained disciples in front of the dwelling. Only Xiao Songgong, the two Discipline Hall elders, and their disciples behind them found nothing to laugh about.

Xiao Songgong took a deep breath, then said, "You hand over the Myriad Sword Array, abdicate, and let Qi Jian stand trial. I will only administer the sect for five years and then seclude myself in the back mountains, handing over the position of Sect Master to Martial Nephew Qiushan."

The Sect Master paid him no attention. Turning to the two Discipline Hall elders, he said, "My two senior brothers, do you also support this?"

The Discipline Hall elder impassively said, "Sect Master, whether you abdicate or not is not something for the Discipline Hall to decide, but if you insist on withholding custody of Qi Jian, the Discipline Hall will demand that you temporarily hand over your authority."

The Sect Master serenely replied, "My two senior brothers want to discuss rules, so let us discuss rules."

The Discipline Hall elder said stolidly, "May the Sect Master speak."

"At present, Junior Martial Uncle is entrapped in the north. The Mount Li Sword Sect Sword Array has been operational for many days, only waiting for some definite news. Yesterday afternoon, we received news that Junior Martial Uncle had appeared in Xunyang City. The three elders of the Sword Hall brought with them the sect's elites to enter the Sword Array, preparing to head off to Xunyang City to rescue Junior Martial Uncle. Who could have foreseen that Elder Xiao Songgong would actually collude with outsiders from the Longevity Sect, damaging the Sword Array last night and trapping the three elders of the Sword Hall and every one of my Mount Li's elites in the belly of the mountain? If you say that Qi Jian and the wolf youth supporting each other in the Garden of Zhou is a sin, then dare I invite the two Discipline Hall elders to ask what sort of sin is this?"

The Sect Master calmly asked the two Discipline Hall elders, "Now Junior Martial Uncle is heavily injured, alone and without help. If he were to die at the hands of those thieves and scoundrels... Since my two senior brothers do not resent Junior Martial Uncle for that old affair of the Mausoleum of Books, shouldn't you two at this time first cripple Elder Xiao Songgong's cultivation and throw him in the Discipline Hall's prison before doing anything else?"

The Discipline Hall elders were silent. The Sect Master looked at the two of them, a mocking smile on his face. Bai Cai spit on the ground in front of him, shameless to the extreme. All the mountains of Mount Li were quiet, and then erupted in countless cries of anger and abuse.

"If Su Li...is my Mount Li's Martial Uncle, then Elder Xiao Songgong's action are naturally treason against this mountain."

The other Discipline Hall elder suddenly said, "But if Su Li originally committed treason against this mountain, then Elder Xiao Songgong's actions are not a crime at all, but actually a great merit."

The Mount Li Sect Master slightly narrowed his eyes but said nothing, his ridicule plain on his face. Bai Cai sneered, "Make it up, continue making everything up. The books you've all made up, I'm afraid not even Second Brother or Chen Changsheng have seen them before."

"Su Li has always been a madman."

Xiao Songgong coldly said, "Back then, it was him that prevented the northern expedition. Ten-odd years later, it's now him that prevents the unification of north and south. Just what does he want to do? He's not older than us and he entered the sect later than us. If his luck were not good, for what reason should we call him Martial Uncle? Just why should he bring Mount Li to that place? You all don't care, but the disciples of Mount Li care!"

At this point, neither Xiao Songgong or the two Discipline Hall elders continued to refer to Su Li as Martial Uncle, but spoke of him directly by name—these people that had rushed the main peak of Mount Li had finally revealed their intention. They wanted to borrow the difficult questions raised at Qi Jian by Liang Xiaoxiao's death and ultimately use this matter to completely eliminate Su Li's influence from Mount Li.

Of course, all of this had been established on a single foundation.

Su Li must die.

Chapter 407 - Chaos For Two Women (II)

The Sect Master indicated that Bai Cai no longer needed to support him. He slowly took two steps forward, and then, separated by those dozens of bright sword glows, looked at those senior brothers that he had once been so close and familiar with and those familiar-looking disciples. He also looked at that elder from the Longevity Sect and the experts from the Qiushan family. The corners of his lips slowly rose up, revealing a mocking smile.

"A thousand autumns and ten thousand generations."

"The unification of north and south."

"For the human world."

"To oppose the demons."

He said these phrases with his mocking smile, but they were even more so radiant and dignified. In this case though, no matter how radiant and dignified those phrases, or reasons, were, they would always be mocked. Because these were all merely excuses.

"Was it the Pope or the Divine Empress...that promised you these benefits?" The Sect Master's gaze moved slowly over Xiao Songgong and the two Discipline Hall elders, ultimately resting on the head of the Qiushan clan.

The Qiushan clan head slightly lowered his head in greeting. He

smiled but said nothing, as if he didn't realize what sort of tense situation he was in.

"Yes, the unification of the north and the south, the human world together as one...these are all benefits, these are precisely the benefits that come from killing Su Li. No matter how much you mock it, it is still a good thing."

Xiao Songgong looked at the Sect Master and said, "For the future of the Mount Li Sword Sect, for the health and happiness of the ten thousand surnames of the South, I don't care how selfish you say I am, but how can such benefits not move the heart?"

The Sect Master remained silent for a very long time, then he abruptly raised his right hand and extracted a sword from those dozens of sword glows.

These were the streaks of light of the Myriad Sword Array, and only he could perform this action in such an understated manner.

Xiao Songgong said, "It seems that you're still not convinced."

The Sect Master answered, "Because I am not convinced about your assertion that Junior Martial Uncle has betrayed the mountain, about where this crime came from. Just like Little Six Bai Cai said, if you make something up, it should at least be decent."

Everyone turned to Xiao Songgong and the two Discipline Hall

elders. Even the Qiushan clan head and that Guardian of his with unfathomable strength were looking at him. The peak was quiet for a very long time until finally one of the Discipline Hall elders opened his mouth and said, "Su Li, he...his rebellious influence has always been preventing the unification of north and south. We suspect...that he's colluding with the demons."

The Sect Master shook his head in amazement, sighing, "Truly shameless."

The Qiushan clan head also couldn't help but shake his head. Most likely, he felt that this explanation was far too nonsensical.

"Martial Uncle has battled with the demon experts for many years. Who knows how many demons have fallen to his sword? If not for him, why would the demons have been so well-behaved these past few years in the snowy plains? This current situation where he is now a dragon that has swum into the shallows and been surrounded in Xunyang City by those contemptible and shameless fools is precisely because he, for the purpose of slaying the demon Military Advisor Black Robe, entered the demons' encirclement and was thus heavily injured..."

The Sect Master gazed at that Discipline Hall elder and said, "Those people in Xunyang City are very shameless, and you would actually accuse Martial Uncle of colluding with the demons. This already exceeds shamelessness and reaches the level of being inhuman."

These words were said very calmly and sincerely, but the emotions behind them were very fierce. The responses of the

disciples in all the mountains were also very fierce. All sorts of filthy words were hurled towards the main peak. It must be known that Su Li was not merely their Martial Granduncle, but the essence of Mount Li's spirit, the idol of every young disciple. How could they permit this senior to commit such slander?

Xiao Songgong sneered. "Only an act."

The Sect Master yelled, "Senior Brother, if you do not have evidence, then I can use these words of yours to expel you from Mount Li."

Xiao Songgong stared into his eyes, giving a smile that was not a smile. "Do you really want evidence? It must be known that although no one dares to mention that matter anymore, the exam paper from after that blood-spattered incident should still be stored in the Li Palace."

The Sect Master's expression became more solemn at these words. "You...what matter are you talking about?"

Xiao Songgong bitterly laughed, "There are no absolute secrets in this world. Su Li thought that if he killed all the people at the side of the cold pool, he could just hide it like that!"

The Sect Master's gaze was incredibly sharp as he yelled, "Hold your tongue! If you dare to act recklessly, do not doubt I'd shatter my sword heart and use the Myriad Sword Array to kill every one of you that climbed up this mountain!"

Hearing these words, the hearts of the disciples on the peaks of Mount Li couldn't help but shiver with cold. Such powerful killing intent, such an intense method—could it be that this internal chaos of Mount Li would really culminate in such a bitter conclusion? Just what was the secret that Xiao Songgong wanted to say?

"Don't tell me that these disciples are no longer disciples of Mount Li, that just because you want to conceal this secret, you want them all to die?"

Xiao Songgong stared at him and sneered, "If you really did carry out such a vicious method, I wonder after you die how you would meet the ancestors of Mount Li. I originally didn't want to reveal this secret, but now that I've been forced to this point, I must tell the entire continent. Qi Jian is not merely Su Li's daughter, she is also..."

He turned to the dwelling behind the Sect Master and the several dozen disciples. Despite being separated by that very heavy door, it seemed like he could see the unconscious Qi Jian. He declared coldly, "She is the daughter of a Demon Princess!"

The Sect Master furiously bellowed, "Hold your tongue!"

Xiao Songgong wasn't afraid in the slightest. With disdain, he continued, "She is the daughter born of Su Li and a Demon Princess!"

The mountains of Mount Li were in an uproar. There were

endless shouts and curses—just who would believe this? Yes...Xiao Songgong's words still reverberated through the peaks of Mount Li. With his voice, the sound coming from the peaks grew smaller and smaller.

"Back then, for what reason would the Longevity Sect imprison that woman in the cold pool? Why did the elders have the confidence to request that Su Li perform such a great act to atone for his crime? Because Su Li had already committed the most heinous of crimes."

As Xiao Songgong thought of that world-shaking event from ten-odd years ago, he suddenly felt that even the wind running through the peaks had grown colder by a few degrees. "Only who could have imagined that Su Li would actually have become so daring? For one demon woman, he killed the ten-odd elders of the Longevity Sect! For this reason, just how many experts did the human world lose? And you actually dare to say that he can't possibly be colluding with the demons!"

The curses abruptly came to a halt. The peaks of Mount Li had grown deathly still; the people had faintly sensed that this matter might be true, so they were shocked beyond belief. Even the Qiushan clan head and that Guardian of his couldn't help but arch their brows. Only that Longevity Sect elder was as calm as before. His eyes flashed with cruelty out of joy from recompensing his hatred. Presumably, he had long since known of this matter.

The disciples of Mount Li could only leave their mouths open in speechlessness. When Xiao Songgong had previously revealed Qi Jian's history, they could still accept it. Some of them, because of

Martial Granduncle, even felt emotions of reverence, pity, or love towards Qi Jian, but the feeling they had now was completely different. She was a daughter of a Demon Princess? Martial Granduncle actually had this sort of past relationship with a Demon Princess...

After some time had passed, a rather uneasy voice broke the silence. One of the disciples standing in front of the dwelling asked the Sect Master, his voice shaking, "Sect Master, this matter...is it true?"

Chapter 408 - Still That Qiushan (I)

That Mount Li disciple had previously stood in front of the dwelling, staining his clothes with blood and not retreating even half a step nor showing the slightest cowardice. His loyalty and bravery were not in doubt, but even he could not help but question now. The peaks of Mount Li were all silent and all for the same reason. The vast majority of the disciples of Mount Li all stood firmly by the Sect Master, indignant at the shameless conduct of Xiao Songgong and the other two elders, but now there was a change—Su Li was the idol of Mount Li, but if what Elder Xiao Songgong said was true, then this idol was gradually beginning to collapse.

In front, from Tempering Stone Peak, came the voice of a disciple, "If Senior Brother Qi Jian really is...a descendant of the demons, then perhaps...the Discipline Hall really should be allowed to ask a few questions."

Bai Cai was enraged at these words, but before he had time to say anything, he saw one of the disciples by his side plop to the ground and get on his knees. The disciple began to kowtow towards the Sect Master's back, even dipping his forehead into the blood-soaked ground.

"Master, if...Junior Brother really is the daughter born of Martial Granduncle and a Demon Princess, why is it necessary for you to put your all into covering up for him? A few days ago when everyone was saying the Junior Brother had killed Third Brother, I didn't believe a word of it, but if in her body flows the filthy blood of the demons, and then she even collaborates with that wolf youth hybrid, then what can't she do?"

The Sect Master looked at this disciple who was normally the most deferential to him, and he softly sighed. This disciple's entire family had been slain by the Demon Army, so what could he rebuke him for?

When Bai Cai looked at those two disciples and heard the growing discussion coming from the distant peaks, his anger was only inflamed further. He yelled, "The grand disciples of Mount Li have been confused by the heresy of the enemy! Just where have your sword hearts gone!"

The surrounding peaks grew somewhat quieter, as did the main peak.

Xiao Songgong once again sneered and moved his gaze to Bai Cai. "If your sword heart really is stainless, then why do you only dare to reprove your fellow disciples? Why do you not dare to ask your master whether this matter is real or fake?"

Bai Cai's gaze was still enraged, but he clenched his teeth in silence.

Silence sometimes meant that one was extremely angry, other times it meant that there was nothing to be said, and still other times it indicated tacit agreement—quite some time had passed since Xiao Songgong had revealed that Qi Jian was the daughter of Su Li and a Demon Princess, but the Mount Li Sect Master continued to stand in front of the dwelling, showing barely any expression and saying nothing. But his meaning was exceptionally

clear.

The several dozen disciples standing outside the dwelling and the even more numerous disciples in the surrounding peaks were all looking at the Sect Master.

Up until this very moment, they had still been loyal to Mount Li and supported the Sect Master, finding Xiao Songgong and the two Discipline Hall elders to be shameless. However, now they began to believe that Qi Jian and even Su Li had some relationship with the demons. Or else why would Third Brother Liang Xiaoxiao on the verge of death direct such a complex and pained gaze towards her?

Even Bai Cai's sword heart began to waver, his emotions growing somewhat frustrated.

Ten-odd years ago, Mount Li and thus the entirety of the human world, because of two women, had a falling out. Ten-odd years later, this matter finally reappeared in Mount Li and began to change the entire situation there.

Finally, the Mount Li Sect Master opened his mouth to say something. He looked into Xiao Songgong's eyes and said, "You should not know of this matter, because the people that knew of it were all killed. Besides three of the Saints and me, there should be no one else that knows. Not even the Demon Lord should know, so how could you know?"

This was a very difficult question to answer, so Xiao Songgong's expression suddenly turned icy, seeming to possess no intention of

responding.

"Even if the Tianhai Divine Empress or the Pope wanted to kill Junior Martial Uncle, the Dao hearts of the Saints float about in the sea of stars. It is impossible for them go back on their oath. The other Saint is even less likely to act against Junior Martial Uncle's interest."

The Sect Master did not explain why that Saint would not harm Su Li. He said it as if it was taken for granted. He continued, "Then, how were you able to learn this secret?"

Xiao Songgong sneered, "As I said, there are no secrets in this world that are absolute."

The Sect Master's expression was grave and stern."That year, Junior Martial Uncle went north to Xunyang City and killed everyone in the Liang Household that knew of this matter. The Divine Empress and the Pope also wanted to wash their hands of this matter and ended up protecting this secret. I very much would like to know just who amongst these three leaked this matter to you."

Xiao Songgong's expression shivered with fear at these words. Only now did he find out that behind that bloody incident of the past was originally the will of these three great powers.

The Sect Master continued, "If you cannot say where this information originated from, then I can only believe that this is the work of Black Robe."

This was a very crude conclusion, but in the Eastern Continent, it was also the most convincing. Because amongst the humans, demons, and demi-humans, there was an acknowledgment that was almost close to a truth—Black Robe knew all of the world's secrets.

"If it really was Black Robe that told you...you say that Junior Martial Uncle is colluding with the demons, but what about you? The demon Military Advisor is using your hands to destroy the foundation of my Mount Li; does this count as colluding!?"

He was truly worthy of being the Sect Master of Mount Li Sword Sect. Every word of his was a sword. After the sneak attack, his body was severely injured, but these furious and combative criticisms were still like booms of thunder, resounding through all the peaks of Mount Li. They caused the discussions going on in the surrounding peaks to spontaneously come to an end, and the situation shifted once more.

It was clear that the two Discipline Hall elders did not know the origin of this information, and they subconsciously turned to Xiao Songgong. In the end, Xiao Songgong could not bear the might of those sword-like words. His face a little pale, he answered, "It was from the testament Liang Xiaoxiao left before he died."

The Sect Master silently listened to these words, then said, "So it was like that."

He moved his gaze to the Longevity Sect elder and said, "It was

recorded that year that it was precisely Senior Brother Jiang that brought those two children to Mount Li. It now seems that he presumably already knew of his history back then."

After a few moments of silence, Elder Jiang said, "I do not know when he found out his own history. I also learned of this matter after Zhuang Huanyu secretly delivered that testament to the Longevity Sect."

The Sect Master asked, "Banhu has still clearly not learned about his history, let alone that major affair from that year. Xiaoxiao is younger than him by a little, so why would Elder Liang entrust his vengeance to him?"

Elder Jiang replied, "Perhaps ten-odd years ago, Elder Liang already saw that Liang Banhu was too honest and sincere, far from being as vicious, sinister and steady as his younger brother."

It truly was like this. In terms of viciousness, sinisterness, and steadiness, who in this young generation was Liang Xiaoxiao's match? Even after he was dead, none could lay such a claim.

Such a young genius, his cultivation still in Ethereal Opening, would even dare to have a Saint sink into the depths of misery as a sacrifice for his lofty goals. Using his own death, just how many winds and waves had he stirred up in Mount Li against Chen Changsheng and Wofu Zhexiu? It had all been a diversion, a method he had used to muddy the waters. Of course, it had also been something he had been willing to do along the way. His true target had always been Mount Li—it had always been Su Li.

Liang Xiaoxiao keenly understood that he would never have the opportunity to kill Su Li in this life. Even harming Qi Jian would be very difficult, so he had chosen the most desperate path and used the most extreme method. He wanted to destroy Qi Jian's reputation. Things like reputation did not need any sort of evidence to destroy, only malice and conjecture. This was not even to speak of the fact that in the eyes of the common people, he was the senior brother that cherished Qi Jian the most. He wanted to destroy Su Li's legend. Things like legends were the most divine and solemn, but they were also the easiest to malign, because Su Li had himself done things that were too easy to malign.

Together with that unfathomable demon Military Advisor in the distant snowy plains, one in the south and one in the north, they arranged the events within and without the Garden of Zhou and set up these two significant assassinations in Xunyang and Mount Li!

For this, he only needed to pay his life, then leave behind a single emotional gaze and one testament.

Before he died, he had presumably already completed all these calculations. Although he had died, countless people would continue his plan in accordance with his arrangements. Taking his emotional gaze and testament, they would continue the battle.

The entire world would take vengeance on his behalf, and on the behalf of his elders.

It could be believed that the moment when he drew his last breath outside the Garden of Zhou, Liang Xiaoxiao had been calm and joyful.

Xiao Songgong said nothing. The two elders of the Discipline Hall said nothing. That Elder Jiang of the Longevity Sect also said nothing more. The Sect Master stood behind the several dozen sword glows, quietly gazing at the sword gripped in his right hand, pondering something. They were present-day experts at the upper level of Star Condensation. They could kill a junior like Liang Xiaoxiao with a wave of their hands. Yet now that they had completely understood Liang Xiaoxiao's intentions and his preparations, they felt an indescribable tinge of reverence for that now-deceased junior.

If they knew that Zhou Tong had described Liang Xiaoxiao as his most suitable successor, perhaps they would have felt the same.

In a brief span of time, the Sect Master of Mount Li seemed to get rather older. He understood everything and a faint sense of regret took root in his heart. From such a young age, Liang Xiaoxiao had lived in revenge, even concealing it from his own brothers. Just what sort of suffering was that? Why was it that he had never sensed this peculiarity?

The silence was finally shattered in the next moment, and the one to break it was the Qiushan clan head. Before dawn, he had followed Xiao Songgong and the rest up Mount Li's main peak. After that, this Qiushan clan head and his unfathomably powerful Guardian had said not a word, even though where they stood clearly communicated which side they were taking.

"This matter nevertheless must be resolved," the Qiushan clan head said gently to the Sect Master.

This head of a prestigious family of the south seemed to still have a smile about his face, but his words were tough and unyielding. "Since the blood of demons runs through Qi Jian's body, she should naturally be handed over to the Discipline Hall for questioning. Sir Su Li who concealed this matter should also bear some of the blame, but since he has already died in Xunyang City, that subject can naturally be dropped. As for the venerable Sect Master...I believe that you really should step down."

These were all demands that Xiao Songgong had brought up, and the Qiushan clan head had repeated them once more.

All the Mount Li disciples once again grew tense.

This was a bout of internal unrest, a confrontation between two factions of power. It had even already exceeded the bounds of Mount Li and had become a clash between two great powers of the Southern Heaven. This fight was over the position of Sect Master of Mount Li. The myriad swords had yet to break through the clouds and not much blood had been spilled. Could it be that today, Mount Li would really become a green mountain dyed in blood?

The most crucial point was that even though these words had just been a reiteration, coming from the mouth of the Qiushan clan head, they were even more unyielding and forceful than when Xiao Songgong had said them. It was not merely because of the status of

the Qiushan clan in the south, but because...he was Qiushan Jun's father.

Chapter 409 - Still That Qiushan (II)

In the south, the Qiushan clan was naturally an extraordinarily amazing existence, but this Qiushan clan head was not all that famous. In terms of both cultivation and knowledge, he was very mediocre. There was even a saying in the continent: all the talent of the Qiushan clan completely fell on Qiushan Jun, so much so that even his father was ordinary.

A similar commentary was also bandied about the capital of the Great Zhou. Although Divine General of the East Xu Shiji received the deep trust of the Divine Empress and had an exceptionally high status in the Great Zhou Army, everyone knew that this was all because he begat a good daughter. When compared to his daughter Xu Yourong, whether discussing talent, military strategy, or intelligence, Xu Shiji was cast into the lightless shadows by his daughter.

There were even many people that were perplexed on just how Xu Shiji and the Qiushan clan head could possibly give birth to Xu Yourong and Qiushan Jun. But this was a fact, just like it was also a fact that the Qiushan clan head's words were more forceful than Xiao Songgong's...because he was Qiushan Jun's father.

In Mount Li, Qiushan Jun was the most unique person; one could even call him an anomaly. In the hearts of this young generation of disciples, he was the only person that could be discussed on par with Martial Granduncle Su Li, even if his cultivation was still vastly inferior to Su Li's. Even the Sect Master to a certain degree did not have as much prestige as Qiushan Jun.

From the Sect Master down to the most ordinary disciple, there was no one that did not like Qiushan Jun. From the most somber Discipline Hall elder to the unfeeling and fierce Guan Feibai to those demi-human servants that had been punished to sweep the leaves in the back mountains for forty-odd years, whenever anyone saw Qiushan Jun, they would always give their sincerest smile and show him the greatest kindness.

Every display of kindness and love was mutual. Qiushan Jun had lived in Mount Li for ten-odd years and had bestowed ample love and kindness to every person that lived in it. And the thing called prestige was like ten thousand brooks forming a river, created from his devotion to Mount Li in the ten-odd years he had lived there. To put it in simpler terms, he had bled for Mount Li, bled lots of blood.

So when the Qiushan clan head spoke, all of Mount Li would quietly and sincerely listen to his words.

Only nobody at this time realized that in that dwelling on that sickbed where that young man who had been in a coma for several weeks lay, a finger hanging over the edge of the bed began to slightly move.

"This was originally an internal matter of the Mount Li Sword Sect. Logically, my Qiushan clan is not qualified to speak about it."

The Qiushan clan head looked at the Sect Master, looked at the several dozen Mount Li disciples standing in front of the dwelling, and calmly said, "But now the situation is this. Sir Su Li and Qi Jian are suspected of colluding with the demons and stirring

bloody rains and foul winds within the Garden of Zhou. And it was my son Qiushan who, for the purpose of opening the Garden of Zhou and because of this demon infiltration, completely exhausted his essence blood. Presently, he is still in a coma, his ultimate fate unclear! I think that as his father, I have the qualifications to stand for him and request that all the people of Mount Li do some things."

These words were said to the Sect Master and the several dozen disciples beside him, and also to the disciples in the other peaks of Mount Li.

Countless gazes, filled with concern and apprehension, rested on the tightly shut stone door of the dwelling. The Mount Li disciples were all thinking, if what Elder Xiao Songgong said is true, that this is all the scheme of the demons... Senior Brother Liang Xiaoxiao is already dead; could it be that now Eldest Brother will also have to pay his life as a price? Could it be that Martial Granduncle really took Mount Li as his personal property and decided to pass down the position of Sect Master to Qi Jian and not Eldest Brother? How could this be okay! If this is all true, then the Qiushan clan's anger is certainly very reasonable.

All the peaks of Mount Li abruptly went silent. Bai Cai's expression subtly changed. He understood that this signified an exceptionally ill omen, indicating that the hearts of the people were gradually shifting. However, even for him, there was still no way to respond to these words, because in the entire matter, Eldest Brother was the most innocent. Even now, he was still in a coma and no one knew when he would wake up.

The several dozen disciples in front of the dwelling all gazed at the Sect Master, their expressions rather complex.

Xiao Songgong looked at the Sect Master and said expressionlessly, "Hand over the Myriad Sword Array."

The Discipline Hall elder said with a voice as hard as iron, "Might I bother Senior Brother Sect Master to bring out the demon woman Qi Jian."

Longevity Sect Elder Jiang was serene and silent.

The Qiushan clan head calmly said, "I need you to hand over only one thing."

Previously, every word of the Sect Master's had been like a sword. Now, it was time for him to bear a rain of swords.

These words which pressed him step by step, the hesitation exhibited on the faces of several dozen disciples behind him, the silence of the peaks of Mount Li—these were all swords. The testament borrowed from Liang Xiaoxiao, the name of Qiushan, the returning of the myriad swords, the transition between dynasties, the Longevity Sect once again holding the south in the palm of its hand, the Qiushan clan's advance into the north, the unification of the north and south, the world united as one...this was truly a glorious and beautiful picture scroll!

As the Sect Master thought about this picture, a slightly bitter

smile appeared on his face.

Xiao Songgong had no plans of giving him any time to think. Turning to the several dozen disciples standing in front of the dwelling, he sternly yelled, "Your Eldest Brother has been harmed by the demons' plot! For the sake of letting the cultivators out of the Garden of Zhou, he unsparingly consumed his essence blood to once again open the Garden of Zhou until he suffered heavy injuries and fell into coma! Don't tell me you want to do this thing that would gladden our enemies and pain the ones close to you? Shouldn't you be quickly putting down your swords, or else when your Eldest Brother wakes up and sees a river of blood running down the main peak of Mount Li and disciples massacring one another, just how pained will he be!?"

These words of his were all imbued with true essence and seemed like countless swords. Although the several dozen sword glows in front of the dwelling dispersed the vast majority of it, the sharpness of the words still remained. The faces of those Mount Li disciples grew increasingly conflicted. There were some people whose swords inadvertently drooped to the ground, while there were even more people that watched the Sect Master, hesitating as they waited for his final decision.

Seeing this scene, Xiao Songgong inwardly cursed in the depths of his heart, then he clenched his teeth and used his final method, his voice transmitting to all the peaks of Mount Li. "Today, I violated the laws of the sect, intruded the main peak, and was disrespectful to the Sect Master. I only want the Sect Master to abdicate and bring out the demon woman Qi Jian. I will not receive five years of the Sect Master's position, this being my proof that I do not covet power, that I am at fault, and that I humbly

apologize."

With these words, the peaks erupted in a clamor. Even those Mount Li disciples that were the most furious at Xiao Songgong's conduct were forced to admit that these conditions were enough to express his sincerity.

The Longevity Sect elder asked, "Then the position of Sect Master...who should it go to?"

Xiao Songgong silently pondered this for a few moments, "My senior and junior brothers imprisoned in the sword array will have their own opinions, but if you ask me, it's still...Qiushan."

The Longevity Sect elder smiled. "He's too young, isn't he?"

Xiao Songgong said no more.

The Qiushan clan head also said nothing, only indifferently smiled.

The several dozen disciples in front of the dwelling looked at each other in dismay.

Bai Cai walked up to the Sect Master's side, carrying his sword. He felt very dejected, but he didn't know what he should say.

This proposal was seemingly the only resolution that everyone in

Mount Li, from top to bottom, was willing to accept.

At the very least, it could avert that final stage of Mount Li's internal strife which, once reached, would be unmanageable.

Why would Xiao Songgong be willing to pay such a great price? The Sect Master calmly looked at Xiao Songgong and noticed that Xiao Songgong and the Qiushan clan head briefly glanced at each other, and then he understood everything clearly. To see the position of Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect that he had long yearned for but then be forced to submit and give way, and in addition seclude himself in the back mountains in bitter cultivation to atone for his crimes—presumably, the Qiushan clan and the Longevity Sect would have to pay a suitable compensation in the aftermath.

But was this really a resolution that all of Mount Li was willing to accept?

The peaks of Mount Li were all silent. Everyone was waiting for the Sect Master's final decision.

At this moment, a voice came out of the dwelling.

This voice was very weak, yet it was still bright.

It was just like the sky that had been obscured by dark clouds for a very long time: as long as the clouds dispersed, the skies would be as clear and blue as ever.

"I do not accept."

Chapter 410 - Still That Qiushan (III)

In the dwelling, a figure could be seen in front of the sickbed, watching the unconscious Qi Jian.

As his gaze moved from her pale face to her abdomen that had been wrapped in layer after layer of bandages, and then to those fingers which were still suffused with a faint green, it grew colder and colder. Hearing those voices from outside, one unyielding and one forceful, and thinking about those voices he listened to in his Sword Rest, the countless voices he had heard over these past several weeks, his voice also became somewhat cold.

"I do not accept."

That figure said these four words to all of Mount Li, then he walked out of the dwelling. Hearing his voice, the entirety of Mount Li grew silent. The Sect Master quietly looked at Xiao Songgong, the corners of his mouth perking, revealing a smile. That smile contained many meanings, but there was no sign of any of that previous bitterness.

The door of the dwelling was pushed open, and that figure emerged under the crystal-clear blue sky under the watch of several hundred gazes. It was a young man, his body tall and straight, his Mount Li sword uniform slightly flapping in the breeze. It was obvious that he was not fully recovered from his heavy injuries. His face was pale, but it didn't in the least detract from the heroic spirit about his face, or that free uninhibited intent about him.

The young man walked out under these countless gazes, and countless cries of elation and surprise rose up from the main peak of Mount Li.

"Eldest Brother!"

"Eldest Brother is awake!"

"Eldest Brother woke up!"

These cries of surprise quickly spread to the other peaks of Mount Li. In a moment, the tension in the mountains, the extreme pressure and chill felt by these disciples from the old secrets caused by Martial Granduncle, was, for the most part, wiped away.

This young man was naturally Mount Li Sword Sect's Eldest Brother, the head of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws: Qiushan Jun.

One by one, the several dozen Mount Li disciples rushed up. Qiushan Jun shook his head, indicating that there was no need to support him. He slowly made his way over to the steps and then paid his respects to the Sect Master. Then he turned to those people on the other side of the sword glows, his gaze tranquil and serene. Even when he saw his own father, he did not show any signs of being moved.

When they saw that Qiushan Jun had awakened, everyone in the crowd had different emotions, but the majority of them were

primarily happily surprised. Even Xiao Songgong and the two Discipline Hall elders were not too wary. Upon seeing this scene, the Qiushan clan head confirmed the prestige his son had in the hearts of Mount Li's young generation of disciples. His eyes grew even brighter and he lightly stroked his short beard.

Not waiting for Qiushan Jun to speak, Xiao Songgong took the initiative and said, "Martial Nephew Qiushan, you've been in a coma for several weeks and probably do not know what has occurred. Please wait for a few moments so that there are no misunderstandings."

At the moment, the scene in front of this dwelling at the peak of Mount Li was littered with broken swords and spilt blood and the scene was abnormally bloody. Anyone could imagine that after Qiushan Jun woke up and saw this sort of scene, it was only right for him to believe that Xiao Songgong and the rest were forcing an abdication, resulting in his previous four words. Xiao Songgong and the others thought that as long as they could explain the situation, Qiushan Jun would naturally understand what to choose.

No matter how, Xiao Songgong and his group wanted to obtain Qiushan Jun's support. This was because in this internal conflict in Mount Li, the Qiushan clan was one of two backers of their factions, and the status that Qiushan Jun had in the hearts of the young disciples would let them conclude this conflict and then completely grasp the most vital aspect of this situation.

Qiushan Jun was silent for a few moments, then said, "Martial Uncle may explain."

Bai Cai couldn't help but be anxious, wanting to say something to his senior brother. Unexpectedly, the Sect Master stopped him. The Sect Master even returned the sword he was holding back into the sword glows in front of the dwelling.

The elated cries of surprise from seeing Eldest Brother wake up gradually faded and the peaks became silent once more. Everyone once again listened to Xiao Songgong describe what had happened in the Garden of Zhou and Su Li's past deeds.

Elder Xiao Songgong's voice resounded in front of the dwelling. Qiushan Jun remained silent, his pale face revealing no emotion, yet the right hand hanging at his side began to tremble.

This signified his anger, anger that could not be restrained.

Many people noticed this detail and their emotions grew increasingly tense. Bai Cai was even more at wit's end, thinking to himself, just what do I do next? How can I possibly treat Eldest Brother as an enemy?

Xiao Songgong had finished with his explanation.

After a few moments of silence, Qiushan Jun asked, "Martial Uncle, in your view, how should this matter be handled?"

With these words, the final remnants of unease in the hearts of Xiao Songgong and the rest were completely dispelled. The

Discipline Hall elder said harmoniously, "Previously there was already a resolution: Qi Jian will be handed over to the Discipline Hall for questioning, the Sect Master will temporarily abdicate, and since you are already awake, you will, of course, stand as Sect Master."

That elder surnamed Jiang from the Longevity Sect added, "As for Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu who colluded with Qi Jian, the Longevity Sect and Holy Maiden Peak will send a joint letter to the Li Palace. The Pope must also give an explanation."

Xiao Songgong looked at him and said, "Martial Nephew previously did not know the specifics of the situation, and so there were some misunderstandings and you said those four words in the dwelling. Now that everything has presumably been made clear, you should know what to do."

Countless gazes rested on Qiushan Jun's body and the crowd could only guess at how he would choose. This was because the accusations made by Xiao Songgong and the rest were true—Qi Jian really was the daughter of Su Li and a Demon Princess. In order to avoid the continued shedding of blood in this internal conflict, Qiushan Jun would most likely bitterly struggle, but he would assuredly speedily reach a decision. This was the imposing air required of people who did great things, and the entire continent knew that even when he was a child, Qiushan Jun had always conducted himself with such an imposing air, imposingly majestic.

He would definitely choose that which was most conforming to Mount Li's interest, which was most in accordance with the correct

path of humanity. Humans and demons could not coexist. In the face of this, what did the so-called ‘compassion of the teacher’ or ‘the kindness of instructing’ matter!?

The Qiushan clan head calmly looked at his son, his heart bursting with pride. It was pride for the youngest Star Condensation cultivator in history, the youngest Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect in history, and in a few years, the youngest Sect Master of the Longevity Sect in history. Then, in the next few years after that, he would naturally become the youngest Saint in history. Surveying the long river of history, who could be more outstanding than his son? His pride did not merely originate from this, it also came from Qiushan Jun's appearance in this matter—he believed it to be just like Liang Xiaoxiao's death. Qiushan Jun's coma and awakening had both been perfectly arranged.

Qiushan Jun's coma had been very timely, and his awakening even more so. When he fell into a coma, he avoided the internal strife of Mount Li. When he awoke from his coma, the dispute had already reached its end and only he could bring it to a close. He was the only and naturally the finest candidate. He did not need to bear the evil reputation of Xiao Songgong and his group intruding upon the main peak and forcing abdication. He only needed to sleep to grasp all the benefits. In a little while, if he could shed a few tears, he could have his devotion and benevolence be even more praised in the world...

As he looked at his son, the Qiushan clan head sighed sorrowfully. As expected of a dragon son, so far that not even your father can reach.

"There is one problem."

Qiushan Jun gazed at Xiao Songgong and said, "Previously you said to Bai Cai, 'If your sword heart really is stainless, then why do you only dare to reprove your fellow disciples? Why do you not dare to ask your master whether this matter is real or fake?'"

Xiao Songgong had not noticed one detail of these words and said without thinking, "Correct."

Qiushan Jun turned and glanced over at Bai Cai. "Why did you not dare to ask?"

Bai Cai felt that his mouth was awash with bitterness. He thought to himself, and just what use would there be in asking?

Qiushan Jun shifted his gaze to the Sect Master and asked, "Master, are Martial Uncle's words...true?"

Bai Cai was incredibly saddened. He thought to himself, Senior Brother, why do you need to force the Sect Master to such desperate straits? Why are you acting so heartlessly?

The Sect Master looked back at Qiushan Jun, smiling as he prepared to speak.

Xiao Songgong abruptly felt that this was rather inappropriate. He sternly warned, "You must swear upon the ancestors of Mount Li that you will not lie when you tell Qiushan—is Qi Jian really the

offspring of a Demon Princess!"

The Sect Master looked at Qiushan Jun and sighed, "This matter is true."

The meaning of these words was very clear. This matter was true, but all the other matters were naturally not true.

Xiao Songgong didn't care about the rest. He only needed for him to admit this point and it would be fine. He suddenly felt relieved.

As the Qiushan clan head looked at the scene playing out in front of the dwelling, he suddenly felt that there was something off. Yes, both the Sect Master and Qiushan Jun seemed far too calm.

"Just what are you still doing here?"

Qiushan Jun calmly said to Bai Cai, "Quickly help the Sect Master back in so he can rest."

The mountains were completely silent. Everyone was rather perplexed, not understanding what Qiushan Jun was doing.

Even Bai Cai was stunned, and then he sobered up and began to help the Sect Master walk towards the dwelling.

Before he entered the dwelling, the Sect Master said, "Take care of everything properly."

Qiushan Jun replied, "Be at ease, Master."

With these words, he extended his arm into the several dozen sword glows in front of the dwelling and took down the sword that was his.

This was the sword called Dragonscale.

With this scene, everyone realized that at some point, the Sect Master had turned Mount Li's Myriad Sword Array over to him!

Elder Xiao Songgong watched Qiushan Jun, his expression gradually growing more solemn. "You've finished your questions."

Qiushan Jun answered, "Yes, I've finished with my questions."

Xiao Songgong took a deep, deep breath, then asked, "And then?"

Qiushan Jun looked at the mountains and casually said, "And then...naturally, the disciples of Mount Li raise their swords to confront the enemy."

Xiao Songgong's complexion grew abnormally unsightly. He coldly shouted, "Just what are you doing! Did you not hear your master admit that Qi Jian's mother is a Demon Princess!?"

Qiushan Jun raised his sword and looked at Xiao Songgong and

those powerful enemies. He asked, "And so what?"

Chapter 411 - Where Are The Disciples Of Mount Li?

With Qiushan Jun's words, all the peaks of Mount Li were silenced.

Qiushan Jun said to everyone, "What sort of person is Martial Granduncle? Let alone him having a romantic affair with that Demon Princess, even if he married her and brought her into Mount Li, so what?"

Xiao Songgong was enraged, thinking to himself, just what sort of absurd words are these? Even those Mount Li disciples also felt that their most dearly beloved Eldest Brother's words were completely lacking in logic.

Qiushan Jun could naturally sense the mood in front of the dwelling. He explained, "Could Martial Granduncle marrying a Demon Princess possibly impair the well-being of humanity? If it doesn't have the slightest effect, what sort of sin can it be? In my view, it is on the contrary extremely convenient for the humans."

There was someone amongst the peaks that was not convinced and loudly yelled, "Human and demons can't coexist, so how can they be intimate with each other?"

Xiao Songgong's face was ashen as he declared, "Truly absurd to the extreme!"

"The so-called absurd is only what the average person doesn't dare to do, the path that they don't dare to walk." Qiushan Jun looked at Xiao Songgong and said expressionlessly, "My Mount Li Sword Sect, from the time the ancestor founded the sect down to Martial Granduncle, has always dared to do things that no one in the world would dare to do. Only then can we achieve things that no one in the world would dare to achieve. If you call it absurd, then it's absurdly marvelous!"

Then he turned to the disciples on the peak and yelled out in a deep voice, "Martial Granduncle dared to kill the Demon Emperor, dared to marry a Demon Princess. This is truly the daring and bold spirit of Mount Li! As disciples of Mount Li, you don't feel like your heads are held up high, but instead you hang your head down. With your sword hearts unsteady, how could you possibly match with the demeanor of my Mount Li? It truly makes me extremely disappointed!"

His words were like swords, descending from the precipice and raising a wind, borrowing the power of the Myriad Sword Array's sound amplification array to resound throughout all the peaks of Mount Li. They landed in the hearts of all the disciples of Mount Li and, like the ringing of a bell, made them all wake up.

All people said that when swords came out of Mount Li, the swordsmen came out with a superbly sharp edge. The daring spirit of Mount Li, the demeanor of Mount Li, lay in the edge of the sword, to reveal the edge! In front of the cold sword, where were there any laws, where were there any reasons? How could they possibly care about what was absurd? Mount Li emphasized sword intent as the correct path and would absolutely never accept those rotten frameworks and restrictions!

Bai Cai was extremely excited as he thought to himself, Eldest Brother really is Eldest Brother. Once he woke up, he caused all of Mount Li to once again wake up as well! When the countless disciples thought of their previous hesitation, and even of their thoughts of compromising, they couldn't help but feel thoroughly ashamed, so much so that sweat came off them like thick beads of syrup.

The Qiushan clan head looked at his son that had only used a few words to make Mount Li quiet and stern once more. He watched as those sword glows flashed across his son's pale face. His emotions were incredibly complicated and his expression was becoming more grave and stern. Then he glanced at the Guardian by his side. He wasn't clear on what Qiushan Jun was prepared to do next, nor why he was about to do it, but he needed to make some preparations. Xiao Songgong and the others were growing more serious in mood. They had no choice but to begin preparations for the following negotiations. But matters developed at a speed which surpassed everyone's imaginations because Qiushan Jun wasn't planning to negotiate with them at all.

Qiushan Jun lifted his left hand and lightly pointed at the several dozen sword glows outside the dwelling. With a clap, a strand of sword intent shot out from his fingers and towards a small sword of a rather simple style. That small sword abruptly left the sword glows and began to soar towards the azure sky above the peak of Mount Li.

At this time, everyone at the scene already knew that the Mount Li Sect Master had secretly handed over the Myriad Sword Array to Qiushan Jun. Xiao Songgong and the other two elders had

previously denounced the Sect Master for wanting to pass the position of Sect Master to Qi Jian and not Qiushan Jun, but this had already become a joke. However, no one could have imagined that Qiushan Jun would actually be able to control that small and simple sword!

"The Sect Master's Order Sword!" Xiao Songgong's expression suddenly changed and he yelled. The long sword at his waist flew out of its sheath and rose up, hoping to keep that small sword from reaching the peak.

Yet Qiushan Jun had long since made his preparations. With a light wave of his sleeve, those several dozen sword glows flew away from the dwelling and directly shot at Xiao Songgong! These several dozen sword glows were the most powerful portion of the Myriad Sword Array, their might so frightening that it was hard to imagine. Xiao Songgong's courage turned cold—how could he possibly care any more about blocking that small sword? He recalled his longsword so that he could hurriedly confront this threat.

Clangclangclang.

An extremely dense burst of sword edges colliding rang out.

The several dozen sword glows flew back to the dwelling.

Xiao Songgong's clothes were covered in sword slashes, blood gradually flowing out of them, and his face was extremely ugly. Xiao Songgong was the most senior of the elders of Mount Li and

he had cultivated to the upper level of Star Condensation long ago. Back in the capital, in the palace, only when up against the legendary demi-human general Jin Yulu did he cede a point. However, he was still not a match for Mount Li's Myriad Sword Array. If it were not for the fact that the vast majority of the Myriad Sword Array's might was all in the belly of the mountain, preparing to send the elites of the Mount Li Sword Sect north to save Su Li, if it were not just these several dozen sword glows that remained, Xiao Songgong would have become a corpse on the spot!

That small sword had already soared high up into the sky. There were some Mount Li disciples with good eyesight that could clearly make out that in the final moment, that small sword actually split into three, each of which flew to a different location.

That Discipline Hall elder with the surname Hong angrily yelled, "Qiushan, you dare to attack an elder! This is truly high treason!"

Qiushan Jun stared at him and yelled back, "Hong Zhizhou, you dare to bring outsiders to intrude upon the main peak and conspire against the Sect Master's life! This is truly high treason!"

His words were still like swords, firm and upright, shining like they had just been washed. Although his cultivation was far beneath these Mount Li elders, in both discussion and battle, he did not fall the least bit behind, and his vigor was more than enough.

That Discipline Hall elder suddenly stopped, not knowing how to respond.

Qiushan Jun took one step forward and clearly cried out, "Xiao Songgong and these two elders trespassed upon the main peak, conspiring against the life of the Sect Master, colluding with outsiders. They are all marked as traitors. I accepted the Sect Master's orders, grasping the Myriad Sword Array and temporarily holding the authority of the Sect Master. In accordance with the laws of Mount Li Sword Sect, I will expel these three people from Mount Li. I have sent a notice to Holy Maiden Peak, the Longevity Sect, and the Li Palace, asking them to notify the entire world of today's matter!"

Everyone was struck speechless by these words. How could they possibly imagine that Qiushan Jun would be able to act so coldly and decisively, not giving the other side even the tiniest chance for negotiation, and directly expelling the three elders from Mount Li! The Mount Li Sect Master's Order Sword was already flying towards those three holy grounds. There was no more possibility to change this matter, and any chance at compromise seemed to have been cut off.

The Qiushan clan head's complexion grew abnormally unsightly. Up until now, he still had not known what his son was planning to do, but Qiushan Jun had on two occasions used the word 'outsiders'. The meaning within this word was plainly obvious—no matter if they were from the nominally ancestral temple that was the Longevity Sect or his true birth place of the Qiushan clan, when on Mount Li, they were all outsiders, and possibly enemies as well!

Qiushan Jun swept his gaze around to the surrounding mountains and asked, "Where are the disciples of Mount Li?"

Follow me and expel these traitors and outsiders from Mount Li!"

This was still a sword, a thoroughly piercing sword! Qiushan Jun did not need his fellow disciples to think, only to decide! And this happened to luckily coincide with the sword hearts of these Mount Li disciples. How could his fellow disciples not respond? Even those hundred-odd disciples that had followed Xiao Songgong and the two other elders in intruding upon the main peak couldn't help reveal expressions of hesitation and even shame on their faces.

Where were the disciples of Mount Li? From all the peaks of Mount Li came the sound of reply! It was the sound of swords!

Countless swords flew out of their sheaths, and sword Qi exploded outwards, rushing straight upwards towards the vault of heaven!

Chapter 412 - Father And Son (I)

As they saw the sword glows soar up to the sky from the peaks of Mount Li, Xiao Songgong's expression underwent a massive transformation while the two Discipline Hall elders turned grim. That Elder Jiang from the Longevity Sect had an even nastier face. Only the Qiushan clan head fixed his eyes on Qiushan Jun, saying nothing.

Qiushan Jun seemed to pretend he had not seen his father. He said to Xiao Songgong and the others, "Still not offering yourself in surrender? Could it be that you're all prepared to bear the punishment of myriad swords through the heart?"

Then he turned to those Mount Li disciples that had followed Xiao Songgong in intruding upon the main peak and sternly said, "As for you all, to let bygones be bygones...this is absolutely not a possibility, but seeing that today only blood has been shed and no death has occurred, if you put down your swords, I will punish you in accord with the laws of the sect and not expel you from the mountain!"

When those Mount Li disciples had followed their teachers as they intruded upon the main peak, their minds had already been worried. When Qiushan Jun had appeared and then stood unyieldingly behind the Sect Master, the hesitation on their faces was revealed. Now when they heard these words, they became even more immersed in a fierce struggle.

Xiao Songgong laughed in his wrath. His hand gripped his longsword as he said to Qiushan Jun, "Truly absurd to the

extreme! Even if the entire world knows that in the future, you will inevitably have all of the Mount Li Sword Sect in your grasp, you are still not even twenty! As a third-generation disciple, you dare disrespect us elders! You dare to attack me! My Mount Li Sword Sect in these past few years has truly been brought down a crooked path by Su Li!"

Qiushan Jun looked at him and sincerely said, "Crooked people do not walk the straight path. How could a crooked path ever appear before a straight person?"

Xiao Songgong was even more enraged and harshly yelled, "Previously, your master used the sword array to seal off the paths between the main peak and the rest of the peaks precisely because he didn't want the disciples of the peaks to die at our swords! If you dare to have the Myriad Sword Array attack me, just how many people will have to die in the peaks of Mount Li today!? Could it be that you want my Mount Li Sword Sect, because of this internal strife, to really be destroyed in one day!?"

With these words, the sword glows rising up from the mountains seemed to stagnate a little. Bai Cai and the other Mount Li disciple turned to Qiushan Jun, their gazes filled with unease. They keenly understood that Xiao Songgong's words were not wrong. The most powerful elites of the Mount Li sect's Sword Hall were all presently imprisoned by the sword array in the belly of the mountain. Those Mount Li disciples that supported the Sect Master and Qiushan Jun, although numerous, were a far cry from being a match in terms of battle power to the three unfathomably powerful second-generation elders. This was not even mentioning that Longevity Sect elder that was accompanying them or the Qiushan clan head and his enigmatic Guardian.

It must be known that the vast majority of the Myriad Sword Array's power was in the Transportation Sword Array. Even if the third-generation disciples of Mount Li were resolved to live and die with Mount Li, they still did not necessarily have the ability to beat back such powerful enemies! If both sides were to disregard everything and begin to battle, even if Qiushan Jun were to completely express the remaining might of the Myriad Sword Array, it was highly likely that Mount Li would flow with rivers of blood. Who knew how many of those loyal disciples would die in this battle, and if it was really worth it?

Qiushan Jun gazed at the clouds and sword glows around the mountains, his two swordlike brows slightly raised up. Everyone knew that he had already made the preparations to attack. In the next moment, he would attack. He had already expelled those two Discipline Hall elders from Mount Li, so the Mount Li Relic Sword was at his chest—before the Mount Li Relic Sword, there was no ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’, only ‘should’ or ‘should not’.

Bai Cai understood, and said no more. Carrying his sword, he took his place behind his Eldest Brother, calmly and resolutely staring at those powerful enemies. The several dozen Mount Li disciples also understood. They positioned themselves in front of the stone steps and prepared for the final battle. They paid no attention to their injuries from the previous battle and didn't mind that blood was still seeping from their shoulders. They firmly grasped their swords. Xiao Songgong and the other two elders also understood, as did their disciples behind them. Some of them lowered their heads, some of them cursed, some of them silently walked off to the side, and some of them slowly put down the swords in their hands.

At this moment, a voice slowly rang out through the peak.

"When you were four, you encountered a dragon snake on Mount Nanling. All of your servants were killed—only you survived. You did not attack it, but let it take you away to its cave to use as a future morsel. Even today, nobody, including your master within, knows how you managed to survive, just how you managed to kill that dragon snake. But I believe that back then, what you relied on was not your will and courage, but your intelligence."

The person speaking was the Qiushan clan head. He emotionlessly looked at Qiushan Jun and said, "I did not think that the current you would actually have been molded by your master and Su Li into an ordinary man that believes in bravery. This truly makes me very disappointed, even somewhat remorseful that I sent you to Mount Li back then."

Qiushan Jun said nothing, only calmly looked at him.

The Qiushan clan head shook his head and said, "Your awakening was originally supposed to be an enormously good thing, both for you and for the Mount Li Sword Sect, because presently, only you can help Mount Li prevent this catastrophe. In the end, what did you do? If you are thinking about the gratitude and loyalty between you and your master, I can assure you with absolute confidence that no one, not the Longevity Sect, not the Qiushan clan, or even the Divine Empress, intends for your master to die. We simply believe that because of Qi Jian and Su Li, he is no longer fit to hold the position of Sect Master of the Mount Li Sword Sect, but there will inevitably be a role for him in the Longevity Sect's

Congregation of Elders. Mount Li only needs to recognize Su Li's crimes, and then it can welcome a brand-new and beautiful future. What is there to object to?"

The Qiushan clan head's voice gradually grew more tough and cold. "I am your father. The entire continent is well aware that all I have done has been for your sake. Could it be that you fail to understand? No matter how much of a genius you are, even reaching Star Condensation before twenty, today you have involved yourself in an extremely far-reaching matter. How could you possibly resolve it?"

Qiushan Jun quietly looked at him, then suddenly asked, "Father, just what do you want me to do?"

The Qiushan clan head answered, "We want to sweep away Su Li and Su Li's shadow from Mount Li."

Qiushan Jun asked, "Why must you do it in this way?"

The Qiushan clan head expressionlessly replied, "Only this way can we ensure that when Mount Li is passed into your hands, it is clean."

Qiushan Jun was silent for a few moments, then said, "Father, you know I am not this kind of person."

The Qiushan clan head acknowledged, "Yes, if you are not willing, let alone Mount Li, even if it was the world, you still would

not want it. But you must be clear on one point. Su Li...will inevitably die in Xunyang City. If you want Mount Li to remain as strong as it was in the past, you should take hold of true courage and face this reality head-on!"

Qiushan Jun calmly replied, "So I should hand over Junior Brother, ask the Sect Master to abdicate and take up the position myself, and only this way prevent Mount Li's internal strife, preserve its strength, plotting its future and for all ages?"

The Qiushan clan head said with gravity, "Could this not be right?"

"If ignoring facts is required to face reality head-on, then this reality is inferior to ignorance. Because in the following days, who could ignore every decision they made? They would definitely regret it in their hearts." He looked at his own father as well as the four elders and said, "You are already old and can live on this reality for a little while longer, but we are still young. If we live, there will inevitably be many long years waiting for us. In the future years, I don't want to think about today and be filled with regret and pain, so I will not act according to your way of doing things."

You are already old, but we are still young.

Their hearts were incapable of communicating, so their way of doing things would naturally be different.

Hearing Eldest Brother's calm and resolute voice, many Mount Li

disciples suddenly felt like clear spring water was descending from the heavens. Their eyes grew moist and their sword hearts were washed until they shone clear and bright.

The Qiushan clan head looked at his own son, his emotions abnormally complex, so complex that it was hard to imagine. He was proud, yet sad. Proud of himself, and yet angry. For this day of chaos in Mount Li, the Qiushan clan and the Longevity Sect, as well as many powerful experts of the south, had planned for many days. How could they permit a single young man to cause its failure? Qiushan Jun was the son that he was the proudest of, the future of the Qiushan clan. But it must be known that this was not a matter solely involving Qiushan Jun. This was a matter that the Qiushan clan had been working at for one thousand years!

Ultimately, he made a decision.

He looked at Qiushan Jun and impassively said, "Heaven and Earth."

These were two very commonly seen words, but with the appearance of these words, the mountains all went silent. Even the sword glows seemed to dim by several degrees.

Because everyone already guessed at which classic these two words said by the Qiushan clan head originated from.

It was the extremely famous opening to one of the scriptures of the Daoist Canon of the Orthodoxy.

'Heaven and Earth', and then 'Father and Son'.

This was a principle of nature, the natural relationship between humans.

No person could resist.

Chapter 413 - Father And Son (II)

Everyone looked at Qiushan Jun, waiting for his answer.

Would he reply with 'Father and Son', or would he remain silent?

If he chose not to respond, then he would become an unfilial son committing a monstrous crime.

Bai Cai held his breath until his face was red. He knew how much suffering his Eldest Brother must necessarily be in.

Xiao Songgong looked at Qiushan Jun and coldly said, "Don't tell me you would actually dare to strike your own father?"

That Longevity Sect elder showed ridicule and pity in his eyes. Yes, even if Qiushan Jun was completely without a plan and had resolved to battle, even if he could take up the Myriad Sword Array and would even dare to destroy precious jade with it, could he possibly dare to commit patricide?

Qiushan Jun was very quiet, gazing at the distant mountains.

After a very long time, he drew back his gaze and turned to his father. He very properly clasped his hands and bowed.

Then he said those two words, "Father and Son."

A breeze blew through the mountains, seeming just like a helpless sigh.

By cutting the robe, you could sever friendships. By cutting the mat, you could sever relationships. Yet even if you cut off all the flesh on your body, you would still find it impossible to cut off the world's most powerful association, the blood.

Qiushan Jun was perfect, endowed with both great wisdom and great courage, always acting in the most humane way. How could he perform such an unfilial action? How could he possibly attack his own father?

The Qiushan clan head looked at Qiushan Jun, his emotions rather complex. "Everyone says that you have true dragon blood that is rarely seen once in a thousand years, but is there anyone that remembers that within your body flows the blood of my Qiushan clan? Fortunately, you did not forget."

Qiushan Jun said nothing, only calmly looked back at him. For some reason, the expression in his eyes made the heart beat faster.

For some reason, the Qiushan clan head had an extremely unpleasant sensation. Attempting to head off further conflict, he promptly said, "Since you don't want to be unfilial, quickly remove the Myriad Sword Array."

Qiushan Jun was quiet for a time, then said, "Father, you might have misunderstood my meaning."

Everyone was rather astonished. They thought to themselves, the Qiushan clan head said the words 'Heaven and Earth, and you responded 'Father and Son'. You should know that this is a human relationship that is impossible to go against. Could it be that you have some other method?

Qiushan Jun asked the Qiushan clan head, "The father is benevolent, the son is filial. I must respect my father, but Father, shouldn't you also love and protect your son?"

The Qiushan clan head had an ugly expression. He yelled, "Just where did this nonsense come from?"

Everyone knew that although Qiushan Jun grew up in Mount Li learning the sword, the Qiushan clan head looked upon him like a precious treasure. No matter what Qiushan Jun requested, the Qiushan clan head would completely comply. It was even such that the Qiushan clan had also been caring for the disciples of Mount Li over the past few years. On the subject of love and protection, this father, the Qiushan clan head, could be said to have done an extraordinarily fine job.

Qiushan Jun gazed at his father and continued to speak. "Yes, in these past few years, Father has taken care of many things for me and arranged for me many roads, whether it was sending me to Mount Li back then or letting me accidentally encounter Martial Granduncle by that mountain stream. If everything were to develop as Father planned, then in the future, the Mount Li Sword Sect would inevitably be mine, and even the Longevity Sect might be mine. I would become the youngest Saint. If I were to marry Junior Sister Xu, then we would become the new generation of the

White Emperor couple, and the human world of the united north and south would also perhaps be ours. For this reason, you availed yourself of the opportunity while I was gone on my mission to seize the key to the Garden of Zhou and persuaded the various elders of the south to travel to the capital and propose. And you clearly knew that Junior Sister Xu still had not made the preparations to marry me. Even more excessively, you used some method to convince the Holy Maiden to transfer Junior Sister Xu out of South Stream Temple. Yes! Father has done many things for me. How could you not love me?"

After this long monologue was completed, the peak of Mount Li was once more silent.

These words of Qiushan Jun's were very unyielding, very straightforward, very radiant, but the matters he spoke of were of the exact opposite nature.

The expression on the Qiushan clan head's face grew even more unsightly. "Just what are you thinking about?"

Qiushan Jun said, "What I want to say is, Father, the more you love me, the more you are willing to pay for me, the more you will find it impossible to achieve success today. On the contrary, I must thank Father for coming today to Mount Li and helping me to suppress this rebellion, because soon after, perhaps Father will begin to follow my plans."

The Qiushan clan was so angry that his entire body was shaking. "Unfilial son! Could it be that you would actually dare to attack me!"

"Your son would not dare," Qiushan Jun calmly replied, and then he pulled the Dragonscale Sword out of its sheath.

A bright sword glow illuminated the peak, as if a real dragon had peeked its head out of the clouds and bathed the place in light.

The Qiushan clan head abruptly guessed at something and his expression suddenly changed. With a trembling voice, he yelled, "Quickly stop him! Restrain his sword!"

Hearing this shout, the Qiushan clan Guardian's expression suddenly turned cold. The Qi he was emitting suddenly shot up to a terrifying level.

Only now did everyone finally confirm that this Guardian with an unfathomable cultivation was really incomparably strong. As long as he had the time, perhaps he really could break through this remainder of the Myriad Sword Array!

Bai Cai and the other Mount Li disciples did not know what Eldest Brother was prepared to do next. Hearing the Qiushan clan head's order, they subconsciously grasped their swords and moved forward, spreading out in front of the dwelling.

Sword glows were everywhere as the Mount Li disciples arranged themselves in a sword array, protecting Qiushan Jun behind them.

That Qiushan clan Guardian could not block Qiushan Jun.

It wasn't because of that hastily arranged sword array formed by those Mount Li disciples, nor was it because the Myriad Sword Array in front of the dwelling was still operational. It was simply because Qiushan Jun was too fast.

Before Qiushan Jun used his sword, it seemed like he had not done any pondering, not considered any of his own interests, and not caused his sword heart to ring out. He was just like somebody that saw a child playing by the well almost about to fall in, naturally reaching out his hand to catch the child. This sort of attack didn't give the sensation of being fast, but it was very resolute, very right and proper, something that no one could block.

There was a soft squelch.

The Dragonscale Sword...had pierced into his abdomen and exited through the other side.

The body of the sword was covered in dark red blood. It was no longer as bright as before, but rather seemed especially gaudy, like a just-bloomed flower.

A deathly stillness hung over the peak of Mount Li.

Everyone was dumbstruck.

There was not a single voice, only the sound of the wind gently

blowing through the mountains.

It was then that people understood that this mountain breeze was not a helpless sigh, but boundless gasps of admiration.

Bai Cai let out a huge cry and rushed back to Qiushan Jun's side, supporting him as he was about to collapse.

Qiushan Jun's face was pale but his expression was still calm. Blood had drenched half of his body and the sword was still within.

His sword was very fast, very steady, and very accurate. It had pierced completely through his body, but it had not damaged any internal organs.

His sword only needed to budge a little and he would die.

The Qiushan clan head also finally understood. His face became even paler, paler even than Qiushan Jun's.

For Qiushan Jun, the Qiushan clan had paid far too much, done far too many things, and had prepared for far too long.

If this was an investment, then it was absolutely not permitted to fail, but if Qiushan Jun were to die, all of it would go up in smoke.

If this was not an investment, but love, just how could he possibly bear seeing his own son die?

'Heaven and Earth', and then 'Father and Son'.

This was a principle of nature, the natural relationship between humans.

No person could resist.

Yes, it was just like this.

But Qiushan Jun had previously said the words 'Father and Son' not to be imprisoned by the bonds of blood, but rather to use them to counter his own father.

If the Qiushan clan head could use his status as the father to require him to give up on something, then he could naturally use his life as the son to require his father to give up on something.

The benevolent father, the filial son.

The son is the very image of his father.

So it was like this.

Yes.

Chapter 414 - Father And Son (III)

The sunlight shone over the main peak of Mount Li, passing through those sword glows that were like rainbows and resting on Qiushan Jun's body. It illuminated his pale face, his calm eyes, and his body dyed red by his blood. It was both beautiful and bloody, shaking people to the core.

In the end, no one could find a word to say and a deathly stillness continued to hang over the peak.

At this time, the only people with the qualifications to speak were this father and son from the Qiushan clan.

"Father, go home. We've already resolved this Mount Li matter."

Qiushan Jun said to his father as he looked at him. His voice was very steady without the slightest trembling, but everyone could hear the pain within. In order to save the human cultivators in the Garden of Zhou, he had fallen into a coma spanning several weeks before waking, but his injuries were far from recovering. Now that he had stabbed his own sword through his abdomen, he had become incapable of enduring. If it were not for Bai Cai holding him up, he probably would have collapsed already.

The Qiushan clan head's gaze moved from the sword in his son's abdomen to his face, the sense of disappointment in his eyes growing ever stronger, so strong that it turned to indifference, becoming the ultimate apathy. He looked at Qiushan Jun and said, "Just how much did the Qiushan clan pay so that you could have

this reputation? In the end, you would actually use your life to threaten your clan, even if it would cause your clan to pay a terribly bitter price?"

Qiushan Jun said nothing.

The Qiushan clan head's body slightly swayed.

Ultimately, his apathy was only an act. How could he not be angry?

"How could my Qiushan clan produce such a thing, unfilial son!"

With these words, he turned around and began to walk away. He no longer looked at his son nor spoke to him. At the same time, he shouted two words.

"Do it!"

These two words made the entire peak abruptly become tense.

Everyone knew that these two words were meant for that Qiushan clan Guardian. Qiushan Jun was already so severely wounded that he was on the point of death—was the Qiushan clan head still not willing to give up?

The expressions of the two Discipline Hall elders flickered as if they wanted to say something. However, they chose not to speak in

the end. On the other hand, the expressions of Xiao Songgong and that Elder Jiang from the Longevity Sect seemed to be very relieved. Although Qiushan Jun's choice had surpassed their expectations, as long as the Qiushan clan stood firmly at their side, this situation before their eyes would at the least remain under their control. That Qiushan clan Guardian with unfathomable cultivation had previously already brought this strength to its peak in order to prevent Qiushan Jun from raising his sword. Now when he heard the Qiushan clan head's order, he had no need to further adjust his breathing.

Just as the Qiushan clan head's two words had begun to resound in the ears of everyone present, the Qiushan clan Guardian had already acted!

He attacked with the Qiushan Stamp!

In the south, there was a Mount Autumn (Qiushan). It sat in the middle of a great plain, looking just like a giant stamp. The [Qiushan](#) Stamp was a type of palm technique, able to produce a profusion of falling petals and simultaneously attack several dozen enemies. And when this palm technique was trained to some extreme level, it would be like a mountain descending from the sky, continuously ramming against the plain with a vast and enormous might.

(A reminder that Qiushan translates to 'Mount Autumn')

This Qiushan clan Guardian was precisely the only expert in the past century that was able to cultivate the Qiushan Stamp to this extreme.

As the wind whistled through the mountains, the Qiushan Stamp broke through the clouds and descended towards the dwelling at the top of Mount Li.

Boom!

The Qiushan clan Guardian's palm heavily struck...the backs of the two Discipline Hall elders!

Those two Discipline Hall elders weren't on guard at all. They only felt a massive mountain striking them in the back and then vomited blood, soaking their snow-white beards and clothes!

At this time, the Qiushan clan head was just turning around, very casually waving his right sleeve as if he was waving away the depression in his heart and the anger brought about by Qiushan Jun's unfilial actions. No one perceived that the palm in the sleeve was stretching forward!

There was a light clap.

The Qiushan clan head's sleeve rose up and his palm noiselessly extended to lightly rest on Xiao Songgong's left shoulder.

Xiao Songgong gave a wrathful and shocked howl, bringing up his sword in an attempt to block, but just how could he be in time to block? That powerful and extremely pure true essence directly shocked his shoulder to pieces and then rushed in like a deluge into his sea of consciousness.

The moment before he fell unconscious, he finally realized that the Qiushan clan head had actually attacked him!

This man who was rumored to be extremely average and who had been completely overshadowed by Qiushan Jun actually possessed such terrifying strength!

The mountain winds were torn to shreds by frenzied Qi and incessantly shrieked. The two Discipline Hall elders sat cross-legged on the ground, continuing to throw up blood. Only by relying on their profoundly deep powers did they barely avoid death. Xiao Songgong was in an even more miserable situation. His shoulder was a mass of mangled flesh and he had collapsed into the chest of a disciple. Whether he was dead or alive was unknown.

The sound of wind gradually died down and the scene once again became deathly silent.

No one could comprehend just what exactly had happened.

No one could understand why the Qiushan clan head and that Guardian would suddenly attack those three elders.

The situation had changed too quickly, so fast that everyone had been caught unprepared and were all stupefied.

The Qiushan clan head extracted a handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped off Xiao Songgong's blood that had stained his hand. His

expression was very serene.

Elder Jiang from the Longevity Sect stared at him and said with his voice trembling, "You...you've gone mad?"

The Qiushan clan head looked back at him and said, "Elder, why don't you follow me down the mountain?"

Elder Jiang still had not the slightest idea what was going on. Angry and confused, when he heard these words, he was prepared to continue his questions, but then he suddenly sobered up. No matter what the Qiushan clan head planned to do, those three elders had already fallen to his sneak attack. If he wanted to do anything, then perhaps he would be the next target of those attacks.

Just like many experts of the south, Elder Jiang had once had a very ordinary impression of the Qiushan clan head and had even privately mocked him. He had often thought to himself, if it weren't for Qiushan Jun, who would care about this sort of incompetent person? But now he understood that this person wasn't incompetent at all.

Although he still didn't understand why the Qiushan clan head would so suddenly revolt, he could at least see as plain as day just how powerful the Qiushan clan head was—it must be known that even if it was a sneak attack, to so easily dispose of Elder Xiao Songgong in such an understated fashion required a level of strength few people on the continent possessed.

Let alone the fact that the Qiushan clan head still had that similarly unfathomable Guardian at his side.

Elder Jiang understood these things and so began walking down the mountain path without any objection. In the span of a few breaths, he had already disappeared down the winding mountain path of Mount Li, walking without the slightest hesitation.

At the moment, the mountain peak was in chaos. Those disciples that had followed the three elders up to intrude upon the main peak were furious because their teachers had been heavily injured by these sneak attacks, and there were even more who felt frustrated and helpless.

"We should also leave," the Qiushan clan head calmly declared, ignoring those angry and aggrieved stares from the Mount Li disciples.

The Qiushan clan Guardian walked to his side, took the bloodstained handkerchief and stuffed it in his sleeve, then they began to walk down the mountain path together.

In all this, the Qiushan clan head never turned around to glance at Qiushan Jun, not even when he left.

With a gust of cool breeze, his figure could no longer be seen.

On the stone plaza at the top of the main peak remained only some bloodstains.

Qiushan Jun gazed at the mountain path in silence.

With regards to the Qiushan clan, there were some matters that, from the time when he was very young until now, he still did not understand.

That old Guardian was, in reality, his third granduncle. The rich and powerful aristocratic families had always respected strength. He had never understood why his third granduncle who had cultivated to the peak of Star Condensation had not become the next Qiushan clan head. On the contrary, it was his father, who was incredibly mediocre in every aspect, that became the next Qiushan clan head. He had originally thought it was something to do with his true dragon blood, but in that previous moment, when he saw his father attack and when he saw his third granduncle respectfully and silently take that bloodstained handkerchief, he finally truly understood. However, he still did not understand why his father had chosen this course of action at the end.

An extremely luxurious carriage sped away from the base of Mount Li.

The horse pulling the carriage had dragon blood matched within the carriage with dragon snake wine. The interior was carpeted with fur mats woven from demon rabbits.

The people sitting in the carriage were naturally the Qiushan clan head and that Guardian.

"Now that I look at it, this plan to seize the Mount Li Sword Sect was somewhat too hasty. The damages suffered today are rather large."

The Qiushan clan head said as he looked out the window at Mount Li, faintly discernible in the mists. He acted like he had not been the person that had sneak attacked Xiao Songgong at the mountain peak, nor the one that had caused this entire matter to come to nothing.

The Guardian smiled and said, "I don't know what that Elder Jiang will say when he returns to the Longevity Sect."

The Qiushan clan head revealed a derisive smile. "After Sir Su went on that killing spree ten-odd years ago, the Longevity Sect became crippled. No matter what he says, would the Longevity Sect actually dare to declare war against my Qiushan?"

The Guardian's expression grew somewhat more solemn. "But the Empress...what do we tell that side?"

The Qiushan clan head perked up his eyebrows. "The Empress is kind and merciful. She would never force me to kill my own son... yes, that's my son. I certainly can't be as ferocious as the Empress."

He wasn't willing to think about this matter and sighed emotionally, "After this matter of the Garden of Zhou, my son has once again progressed. He could actually think of such a desperate method."

To use one's own life to threaten one's father, regardless of how one looked at it, was very desperate.

Just like how the Qiushan clan head had at the very beginning been prepared to use the words 'Father and Son' to suppress Qiushan Jun, it was all very desperate.

However, the son had been even more desperate than the father.

"He was even more heartless than me, so I could not force him to help me. So naturally, it's only right that I help him."

"But it's unknown when Qiushan will understand this point."

"He doesn't need to understand. It's fine to just do it, just like how his willingness to go to such extremes is a necessary temperament for someone who can succeed at accomplishing great things. Although, this has inevitably revealed to me a fact that makes me rather unhappy."

"What fact?"

"My love for him is greater than his love for me."

After saying these words, the Qiushan clan head went quiet for a few moments. Then he smiled and shook his head. "....but between a father and son, hasn't it always been this way?"

Chapter 415 - Mediocre Saints

"In fact, there are times when even I don't understand how I could beget such an excellent child as Qiushan." The Qiushan clan head gazed out the window at Mount Li which was still not too far away. "Just like how the entire continent doesn't understand how a stupid thing like Xu Shiji somehow managed to give birth to Xu Yourong."

Saying these words, he paused, then said in a much heavier tone, "Of course, Xu Shiji is inferior to me."

The Qiushan clan Guardian knew what he was speaking of and nodded his head. "He's much more inferior than Clan Head."

The Qiushan clan head's eyebrows flew up. He didn't seem at all like that towering figure who so decisively struck out, just a proud and simple father. He said, "From the moment my son's blood awoke, I was doing my utmost to cultivate and study, willing to learn anything. I wanted to catch up to him, and not drag him down. It seems to me now that I've just barely accomplished it."

The smile on the Qiushan clan Guardian's face was very sincere, and one could even make out a sense of admiration—the Qiushan clan head had originally been the south's most famous dandy, so many years ago, when the old ancestor of the Qiushan clan had decided to hand down the clan to the current clan head, he was similarly as uncomprehending as Qiushan Jun. It must be known that at the time, he was already an upper level Star Condensation expert. In addition, in terms of generations, he was an uncle. In

every aspect, it should have been him that was put in charge of the Qiushan clan. Later on, when Qiushan Jun was born and his true dragon blood was awakened, he believed that the old ancestor had made his decision back then based on this and no longer became angry or thought it unfair. He still looked down upon the clan head at the time, thinking that he was just a good-for-nothing that achieved success only because of his son. However, he had long since stopped holding this view. Because to everyone's surprise, after Qiushan Jun's blood awakened, the Qiushan clan head suddenly seemed to become a different person. From that day on, he no longer went out to brothels or horse riding, but rather began to energetically study and cultivate.

At that time, the Qiushan clan head was already a middle-aged man.

For a middle-aged man who had wasted half his life to suddenly begin working with diligence and drive, just what sort of willpower and determination did that require? Just what sort of price needed to be paid? Without even asking, the answer was evident. But he really did manage to accomplish it. In those ten-odd years where Qiushan Jun went from learning how to babble out his first words to learning the sword at the glorious Mount Li, he had also been silently progressing from the initial level of Ethereal Opening to the upper level of Star Condensation. Although it did not seem very equal on the face of it, in reality, it was much more difficult.

What sort of reason had driven him to accomplish such an unimaginable feat? Just as he had said, he did not possess the talent or blood of Qiushan Jun and found it impossible to keep up with his son's footsteps. However, he hoped to get as strong as he

possibly could so that he would at least not impede his son's footsteps.

"Hopefully, Qiushan will be able to quickly understand the clan head's pains," the Guardian looked at the edge of the window and said sincerely.

The Qiushan clan head calmly replied, "Even if he never knows, so what?"

The Guardian said, "But today's events will eventually have all sorts of effects."

The Qiushan clan head looked out the window at that famous mountain of the south. After a long period of silence, he said, "Correct, today's actions at Mount Li truly have produced quite a lot of problems. This was because I did not think that Qiushan was actually this sort of child."

The Guardian was also silent for a few moments, then asked, "Clan head, what did you originally think then?"

This was something that he, and even all the trusted aides of the Qiushan clan, were truly very curious about. Because over the past few years, the Qiushan clan had secretly done many things for Qiushan Jun's sake, things which not even Qiushan Jun necessarily knew about.

"I originally thought that since he was my son, he would

presumably be very similar to me. To view it from another angle, I originally thought that this world could not possibly have a person as perfect as my son, so his perfection was naturally faked."

The Qiushan clan head gave an indescribable smile. "So I believed...my son was a hypocrite. Thus, I secretly did many things; to say that they were completely unscrupulous would not be inaccurate. It was all so that I could give him a solid foundation to match with his reputation in the world, all for that one day in the future when he finally makes his appearance before the populace and bares his true ambitions."

"Such as that time where you went to the capital to propose?"

"Correct. I originally thought that since he wanted to marry Xu Yourong but also didn't want to bear any bad reputation from forcing her, he purposely calculated the time and went to steal the key to the Garden of Zhou from the demons. I'm his father, so it's only natural that I help him settle this matter."

The Qiushan clan head continued, "Another example is this time. I believed that he was faking his injuries so as to not be involved. Simultaneously, he gave my Qiushan clan the opportunity to raise a few difficult questions. This scheme could be considered perfect. Who could have imagined that it was actually I that thought wrong."

"I believed my son to be a hypocrite. I didn't think that he would actually be a true hero."

He looked out the window at Mount Li and smiled. "Only, is there a father that doesn't hope for their son to be a true hero? It's just that it's easy to die when you're a hero. Then it's fine that this father continues to commit unspeakable deeds, continues to play the part of the hypocrite, in order to ensure that this hero lives. Some day in the future when the entire continent learns of my vile actions, he is required to put justice before family, and I then die at his hands...you see, this is such a perfect story."

After listening to these words, a boundless sorrow bloomed in the Guardian's heart. He thought to himself, the clan head really is the world's most extraordinary father. His love towards Qiushan Jun was so selfless that it was actually selfish, so fierce that it inspired fear in others. Anyone that would block Qiushan Jun, that would prevent his progress along this most magnificent river of stars, would be eliminated by the Qiushan clan head. And everyone knew that the only person on the continent who had barely enough qualifications to be discussed on the same level as Qiushan Jun was called Chen Changsheng.

The Guardian began to sympathize with Chen Changsheng's future miserable sufferings.

Of course, that young Principal of the Orthodox Academy would first have to survive and leave Xunyang City.

"With one of the Eight Storms taking action, Su Li will absolutely die, but Chen Changsheng will inevitably survive."

The Qiushan clan head continued, "That youth's background is too deep and his origins somewhat mysterious. Not even the Holy

Maiden Peak could completely clear it up. The Divine Empress has still not said anything and Zhou Tong has not moved. Naturally, I will not take the initiative."

Mount Li was an extraordinary place. Liang Xiaoxiao had used his own death to kill others. On the other hand, his Eldest Brother Qiushan Jun had used his own life to save others. It was often the case that this sort of person did not easily die.

Chen Changsheng was also this way because he had always been saving others. The rain pouring down over Xunyang City was so cold. Perhaps for this reason, his face was somewhat pale. His drenched clothes were pockmarked with holes punched by a sword, but there was not much blood because the rain had washed it all away.

Liu Qing possessed an ordinary and unremarkable face, an ordinary and unremarkable sword, and used an ordinary and unremarkable sword technique. But he possessed the unimaginable cultivation of the upper level of Star Condensation.

As the world's third-ranked assassin, every one of his blows was as cold as ice.

Chen Changsheng had bathed in dragon blood, but he still could not block this cold sword.

In this brief span of time, he had used the Yeshe Step together with the last move of the Mount Li Sword Style to block six consecutive blows of Liu Qing's sword, simultaneously obtaining

six bloody holes on his body.

The sword did not pierce too deep, but it was very painful. Thankfully, the blood that flowed out had no scent. Just like this battle, it was completely tasteless.

If Liu Qing's movement techniques were even more strange, his sword would still find it impossible to stab into Su Li, only able to pierce into Chen Changsheng's body.

Because Chen Changsheng's sword was very resolute, very desperate, and so very fast.

Just like that sword that Qiushan Jun had stabbed into his own abdomen at the peak of Mount Li.

He looked at Liu Qing, his face pale, and with seriousness in each word, declared, "I will not let you pass."

.....

Chapter 416 - Xunyang City's First Answer

As expected of the world's third-ranked assassin, Liu Qing's movement techniques were truly abnormal. Just as Chen Changsheng spoke to him, Liu Qing turned into a puff of smoke and vanished into the rain. When he reappeared, he had gotten extremely close to the buckskin horse with its silently bowed head. And yet...his sword still pierced into Chen Changsheng's body!

Su Li had taught Chen Changsheng three swords, and now he used all three of them. He was growing increasingly proficient with them, and that feeling of living and dying together was growing ever more unyielding, so much so that it had reached the realm that he could call upon it at any time. No one knew how many more uses of the Mount Li Sword Style's final move Chen Changsheng's true essence could support, but he managed to persist until this point.

Blood spurted out from below Chen Changsheng's ribs and then was speedily washed away by the pouring rain. His face was pale and his expression was rather wooden, as if he could no longer feel the pain. But in fact, his spiritual sense was still quickly turning, calculating what this terrifying assassin's next move would be. At the same, he had to keep track of the battle occurring at the other end of the street between Zhu Luo and Wang Po.

This was a requirement of the Intellectual Sword. The time of day, the terrain, the surroundings—everything must be calculated. Chen Changsheng stared at that assassin's ordinary and unremarkable appearance, always thinking that there was some problem with his calculations. He didn't understand why his blood would abruptly lose all its scent, and even less understood why his

opponent's sword was not as frightening as he had imagined.

After bathing in dragon blood, his body's strength far exceeded that of one obtained from a perfect Purification. For Liu Qing's sword to so easily pierce through was already a testament to its power, but according to Chen Changsheng's calculations, Liu Qing's sword should be even more frightening. He had already suffered seven strikes, yet he could still stand in the rain and hadn't collapsed. Why was this?

Those seven strikes had all happened in an instant, so rapidly that even the rain only had time to accumulate a little on the pieces of broken walls. Both those distant spectators, as well as the people hiding elsewhere in Xunyang City, had no time to react. As the torrential rain washed the long streets, only the figures of five people and one horse could be seen in the gloom.

Wang Po stood in the rain, his metal blade having cleaved countless cracks in the space in front of him in order to resist that endless light coming from that end. The edges of those cracks were already extremely bright, illuminating his body. Those lights were all Zhu Luo's sword glows, as gentle as the moonlight, yet impossible to hide from. Every sword glow that landed on Wang Po's body left behind a straight cut, allowing blood to flow out.

He had already become a man of blood. An even more torrential rain would still find it impossible to wash away the blood.

Besides the sound of the rain, there was no other sound in the streets. The rain crashed down like thunder and was very noisy, but those people surrounding the scene felt that it was actually

very quiet.

Liang Wangsun, Liang Hongzhuang, and those people who were willing to pay any price to kill Su Li were silently waiting for Chen Changsheng to fall down. Xue He and Hua Jiefu, representatives of the two great powers of the Great Zhou Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy, continued to maintain their silence. Those priests and soldiers that had hidden themselves within and without Xunyang City also remained quiet.

It was because of Wang Po's silence and perseverance, because of Chen Changsheng's determination. Everyone knew that the Saints desired Su Li's death, and Zhu Luo was only implementing the will of the Saints. Wang Po and Chen Changsheng could be considered the strongest experts of their respective age groups, but when compared to the Saints, in the end, they were but mere mortals. Their current opponents were experts whose strength and cultivation far surpassed theirs, but they relied on their wills, and the explosive strength of theirs that was difficult to describe in words, to persist. Seeing those two figures in the rain, who could not be moved?

Wang Po was a powerful figure of Scholartree Manor. Chen Changsheng was the successor of the Orthodoxy. There was no friendship between them and Mount Li, and they originally should have even been competitors, but in order to let Su Li survive, they had battled with the will of the Saints up to this point. Why did they act this way? They did not like Su Li's temperament. If this were any other time, they probably would not fight for his life in such a manner, but for now, they would not allow his death. Su Li should not be heavily injured for the sake of the war between the humans and demons and then be killed by the human world.

This was a betrayal, a truly shameless action.

In this matter, Wang Po and Chen Changsheng firmly believed that they were in the right and it was the Saints that were wrong.

Then, in this matter, it was their choice that was sacred and inviolable.

Their reasoning was just this simple, but to carry it out was extremely arduous.

Su Li sat on the horse, watching the figure of Chen Changsheng in front of him and the figure of Wang Po even further away. That carefree emotion about him had disappeared to some place quite some time ago.

Until Wang Po and Chen Changsheng fell, Su Li would not die—this was the joint conclusion of everyone in Xunyang City. Wang Po's death would inevitably shake the south and its impact would be massive, but if it was for killing Su Li, this was a price that could still be paid. The problem lay with the fact that no one hoped to see Chen Changsheng die.

Chen Changsheng was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the successor of the Orthodoxy. The Pope wanted Su Li to die, but he absolutely did not want Chen Changsheng to die. It was just that the Pope sitting in the Li Palace in the faraway capital probably could never have imagined that Chen Changsheng would lay down his life for the Li Palace's most powerful enemy.

From Xue He to Liang Hongzhuang, from Xiao Zhang to Liang Wangsun, from the military fort to Xunyang City—Chen Changsheng had battled the entire way. Although he had been on the verge of death several times, ultimately, he did not truly confront the menace of death precisely because no one wanted him to die. Now it was different. Liu Qing was an assassin. Although he also did not want Chen Changsheng to die at his hands, he had already been paid and killing Su Li was his mission. These people that highly valued money, such as Zhexiu, all prioritized completing their mission. This point was even more important than their own lives, so it was naturally more important than some other person's life. In the first seven strikes, Liu Qing had tried not to kill Chen Changsheng. However, he had realized that if he did not kill Chen Changsheng, he really would be unable to kill Su Li... so he must kill him then.

Liu Qing's expressionless face gazed at Chen Changsheng and then once again he stabbed forward. Only this time, his sword was not aimed at Su Li but directly thrust at Chen Changsheng. Upper level Star Condensation assassins were a rare sight. Just how frightening would a certain kill strike from this sort of assassin be? Before Chen Changsheng had even taken on the blow, he was assaulted by the darkness of the night, as if this strike had obliterated the light.

Chen Changsheng knew that he was about to die. He had lived day and night with the shadow of death for several years, and he was most sensitive and mindful of death. But now, he didn't much care for it, or perhaps it was better to say that there was no time to care for it.

No one could change this matter. The still-not-recovered Su Li could not, and the man of blood bitterly enduring in the rain that was Wang Po also could not. Hua Jiefu and the other priests naturally wanted to block this attack from Liu Qing, but they only had time to shout.

Currently in Xunyang City, there was only one person that could prevent Chen Changsheng's death. That person was Zhu Luo.

He was a legend that had stepped into the Divine Domain. Although his sword glows had been blocked by Wang Po on that side, as long as he was willing to pay the price, he could still think of a way to reach the other end of the street.

Suddenly a crack appeared in the rain clouds, and light burst forth. In the rain on the streets, it seemed like the Moon of the demons had appeared. It seemed like a ghost, and yet it was also real.

The metal blade was incomparably firm in the storm. Zhu Luo was still at that end, but another middle-aged man with his hair draped over his shoulders suddenly appeared in front of Su Li. It was a mystical existence that was almost a complete copy.

Moon in Water: this was a movement technique, and could even be called a divine art.

At the most critical moment, this supreme expert of the continent had finally executed his most powerful technique.

He extended his hand and grabbed Chen Changsheng, tossing him to the side and leaving Su Li for Liu Qing.

It was just this sort of simple appearance, a simple toss, and a simple permission.

Zhu Luo had resolved all difficulties.

He would permit Chen Changsheng to live.

He would permit Su Li to die.

In addition, the one to kill Su Li would be this assassin. It would have nothing to do with him.

Even if he was Zhu Luo, for his hands to be stained with the blood of the Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li would also bring troubles.

He was truly worthy of being one of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

The storm enveloped Xunyang.

Originally, this situation had always been in his grasp.

It was simply impossible for Chen Changsheng to avoid Zhu Luo's

hand.

He saw Liu Qing's sword plunge past his body and stab at Su Li.

He knew that there was nothing he could do.

He was somewhat depressed and then exhausted.

Yet at this point, he suddenly realized that someone was laughing.

No, it was more accurate to say that there were two people laughing.

The first person to laugh was Liu Qing, his laughter somewhat strange.

The person to laugh next was Su Li, his laughter somewhat sorrowful and complex.

Why were these two people laughing? Just who truly had a hold over the situation?

The instant that Liu Qing's sword did not pierce into Su Li's body but instead pierced into Zhu Luo's phantasm...

Everything was finally answered.

Chapter 417 - The Strike That Is The Sum Of The Assassin's Life

Zhu Luo had become like a moon in the water, transforming into an almost real copy of himself. Through this, he easily overcame those cracks in space created by Wang Po's blade and arrived at the other side of the rain. If he had directly attacked Su Li, then perhaps Su Li would die in the next moment, perhaps he would have ignored that Chen Changsheng was about to be stabbed to death. Then no changes would have occurred.

But Zhu Luo did not act this way. This was not a mistake. At the very least, in that instant, those people who did not anticipate what would come soon after did not believe Zhu Luo had made a mistake. They even felt that his response had been perfect without anything to fuss over. They sighed with emotion, thinking that this supreme expert of the human world had the entire situation under control the entire time. Thus, they all thought of that fine phrase: a storm envelops Xunyang.

Even Zhu Luo had thought his response to be perfect. Su Li would die, but he would not personally do the deed, and so the Zhu clan of Tianliang County would be able to avoid many troubles in the future. He also did not want to leave such a bright mark on the annals of history, even if the mark he left now would be somewhat duller than he wished. Simultaneously, he also did not forget the Li Palace's request to have Chen Changsheng survive.

A storm encroached upon the city, a moon hidden behind it. A moon in the water turned one into two, the real and unreal acting as one. His original body and copy were actually almost identical in

terms of battle power, so he could put his mind to accomplishing three tasks. Like a god, he used the simplest method to solve the most complex problem.

The scene back then had truly been very beautiful and this matter should have concluded perfectly. This legendary human expert had no reason to not be self-confident, and yet he had forgotten one very important matter. Self-confidence in many cases indicated that one was underestimating the enemy. And what's more, it was only at the final second that he realized who his true enemy was.

That frigid sword pierced into Zhu Luo's ghost body.

Chen Changsheng had previously believed that this sword was not as frightening as he had imagined. It was only now that he realized that his opponent had been going easy on him. This sword truly was very frightening, so frightening that even someone like Zhu Luo could not avoid it.

There was a squelch.

Liu Qing's sword drew a bizarre curved line in the rain, like a tree branch in a [moon pool](#). It cut the moonlight in the water into several pieces and at the same time cut through Zhu Luo's phantasm, deeply stabbing into it.

(A moon pool is, quite simply, a pool of water in which the moon is reflected.)

This was not the end, but rather the beginning.

Only after Liu Qing's sword had stabbed into Zhu Luo's phantasm did the sword begin to explode with its fiercest might. That icy sword suddenly became scalding hot and then it began to glow, began to blaze, and then it began to shoot out countless golden birds made of fire. Every one of these firebirds carried on its back a sun and the stormy street was suddenly lit up. Zhu Luo's phantasm was burned from the inside out!

This was a secret sword of Mount Li that was not meant to be circulated.

The Sword of the Golden Crow.

An infuriated howl arose from the other end of the street.

Zhu Luo ignored Wang Po's blade and watched that scene occurring several dozen zhang away, wrathful beyond belief. Liu Qing's sword had clearly pierced through his phantasm, but for some reason, his abdomen began to bleed.

It had already been several hundred years since he had stepped into the Divine Domain, and had anyone since dared to wound him? Had he ever bled before? He had already forgotten what it felt to be injured, much less that he could even be injured.

Until now.

However, his true wrath was not because of his injury, but

because of that assassin's identity, as well as the fact that this assassin had actually used Mount Li's Sword of the Golden Crow. This made him furious and even gave him a vague sense of unease.

His angry roar resounded through the stormy street. Zhu Luo sent an attack slashing towards Wang Po, his sword intent massively increased. The dark clouds abruptly broke open and the moonlight instantly grew countless times brighter. Simultaneously, the sword glows on Wang Po's body also increased their number by many times.

Wang Po's blood poured down like the rain from his body, but his blade was still unwavering in the storm.

Zhu Luo's attack had slashed at Wang Po, but it had landed even farther away. At the moment he attacked, he had used his Moon in Water movement technique to appear as a phantasm at the other end of the street, and struck out at Liu Qing. Although it was a phantasm, it still contained a strength almost the same as his original body. Even if his opponent was the number three assassin in the world, how could he possibly block the might of this attack?

Liu Qing's ghostly and elusive figure was completely engulfed within the sword glow. There was a screech as countless harsh whistles rang out. In an instant, his body was covered in several dozen bloody holes.

If this were any other opponent, even an expert at the same level of cultivation as Liu Qing, under this sword of Zhu Luo's brimming with rage, they would only be able to die on the spot. There would be no surprises.

But Liu Qing was no ordinary cultivator. He was an assassin.

He was most skilled at killing others, so he was naturally an expert in not getting killed by others.

The seemingly rather ordinary and even rather impoverished set of clothes he wore on his body was actually woven from ghost silk and could block ordinary blades and swords. Of course, in this level of battle, this did not have much of an effect. More importantly, the undershirt he wore beneath his clothes was a suit of flexible armor constructed by the Wenshui Tangs. His ordinary and unremarkable face was actually a mask. Different from the white paper that Xiao Zhang wore over his face, this mask came from the Pavilion of Divination and had the defensive power of a suit of armor. Of course, this also really didn't mean much, but...if all it was added together, it had some sort of effect.

Its effect was that Zhu Luo's enraged strike could not kill him on the spot. It meant that he could still stand in the pouring rain and continue his attack.

Those harsh whistles transformed into the crisp clang of sword intent colliding with a firm object.

Liu Qing was covered in blood, yet he stood firmly.

At this moment, the assassin became a suicide soldier.

Because behind him was Su Li.

That sword that was like a branch in a moon pool had clearly exhausted all its sword energy, but it still moved forward a little bit more. This burning sword, shooting out countless birds of fire and emitting a boundless light and heat, exploded!

In Zhu Luo's phantasm, the sword exploded!

Boom!

The rain pouring down on the long street was sent flying everywhere by the explosion.

Zhu Luo's phantasm suddenly began to give off a blinding light, its edges faintly showing signs of damage.

And on the other end of the street, Zhu Luo's abdomen had actually become a mess of mutilated flesh.

He had silently followed Chen Changsheng and Su Li for several weeks and then in that previous moment suddenly exploded forth, causing Chen Changsheng to be drenched in blood. Only when Zhu Luo appeared on the scene had he finally revealed his true goal. He had not come to kill someone, but to protect.

This strike of his was perfect in every aspect, whether in terms of calculation or anything else.

It could be said that this strike was the sum of Liu Qing's life as an assassin.

It was a very bizarre strike, a very dazzling strike, a very patient strike, a very frightening strike.

This attack was so terrifyingly powerful that it was difficult to imagine.

But...it was still not enough to kill Zhu Luo.

Because this sort of perfection was still only the perfection of humans.

And of experts like Zhu Luo after they stepped into the Divine Domain, you could say that they were already inhuman!

Before the angry howl had ceased, it suddenly became a clear whistle, cold and solitary like the bright moon over the snowy plains.

Zhu Luo's phantasm in the onrush of the pouring rain seemed to waver, but it never scattered.

In the next moment, a ghostly sword suddenly appeared in the phantasm's hand.

The sword was sent stabbing towards Su Li.

Su Li emotionlessly looked at this sword. At some point, his right hand had come to rest on the handle of the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

For people like him, even if they no longer had the strength to battle, they would still like to die fighting.

It was probably this sort of meaning.

After Liu Qing made his attack, he could no longer hold on and tumbled down into the rain.

Blood spurted out of his body and face.

He was no longer capable of doing anything more.

Zhu Luo's sword had come, beautiful and desolate.

Because he was truly angry.

He was determined to kill Su Li. No matter who blocked him, they would die together with Su Li.

Suddenly, a dragon roar could faintly be heard on the stormy street.

Or perhaps it was a dragon cry.

Chen Changsheng was still on the scene.

Just when Zhu Luo was preparing to throw him to the street corner, Liu Qing's sword had come.

So he had fallen on the street.

The Dragoncry dagger was in his hands.

He stepped into the water and rose up, his dagger soaring upwards.

His attack was the dragon cry.

His dagger met Zhu Luo's sword.

The real Dragoncry dagger met with the unreal moonlight sword.

Comparing sword with sword, there was not much difference. The Dragoncry dagger could even be considered stronger.

But the difference in the people using the swords was truly too great.

Noiselessly, that illusory sword, like moonlight illuminating the

snowy plains, easily overcame the edge of the Dragoncry dagger and continued forward.

And then, it was actually blocked by the dagger sheath.

Chapter 418 - The Ten Thousand Swords Which This Youthful Teen Fortuitously Encountered

Chen Changsheng's face was illuminated by the sword glow, just like the snowy plains.

Zhu Luo's phantasm was right in front of him, standing in the torrential rain and emitting boundless light, just like the image of a god.

An unimaginable pressure, following the advent of the sword, fell upon Chen Changsheng's body and soul.

Of course, his strike was inferior to Liu Qing's strike. Nevertheless, it was also not normal. Confronting this supreme human expert who he had never encountered before or even imagined before, he had naturally used his most powerful attack.

The three swords that Su Li had taught him were all put to use.

The Stupid Sword helped him stand firm in the face of this divine pressure. The Intellectual Sword helped him determine the trajectory of Zhu Luo's attack through the downpour. It must be remembered that this attack was of the Divine Domain, formless and traceless. Perhaps experts of the caliber of Wang Po and Liu Qing could understand it somewhat, but if he did not know the Intellectual Sword, he wouldn't have the slightest possibility of grasping it.

Finally, he set ablaze his true essence and his life and attempted to block this attack.

It was a pity that he had no chance of blocking Zhu Luo's sword, just like how the arm of a mantis could never block a speeding carriage.

Completely according to expectations, the ghostly sword imbued with moonlight overcame the edge of the Dragoncry dagger.

And yet, just as Zhu Luo's sword was about to enter Chen Changsheng's eyes, it was blocked by the sheath of the Dragoncry dagger.

How could a ghostly sword be blocked by a real sheath? Only Chen Changsheng understood what was going on. This was very hard to explain with words. To those spectators watching the battle through the rain, the scene that they saw was:

That ghostly sword had stabbed into the sheath Chen Changsheng was holding with both hands.

The water in the night had two moons and on that stormy street, there were two Zhu Luos. One was real and one was phantasmal, but both of their moons were similarly bright. Both Zhu Luos were similarly strong, their only difference being that one lacked emotion.

When that ghostly sword brimming with moonlight stabbed into Chen Changsheng's sheath, the phantasm of Zhu Luo in front of Chen Changsheng did not change in the slightest, remaining expressionless as ever, releasing light and heat. But at the other end of the street, that Zhu Luo who had suppressed Wang Po's blade into silence had his expression transform from quiet and calm to shock and a tinge of confusion.

In the pouring rain abruptly rose the sound of countless swords clashing.

And then, the sound of the pouring rain could be heard no more.

Fierce, rough, sharp, bright, and heavy sounds of clashing swords exploded from the street.

All of Xunyang City could hear this clashing of swords.

That ghostly sword seemed to have instantly encountered countless swords, or perhaps it had collided against them, or grinded against them, or cut against them. The sound of countless clashing swords simultaneously rose up. Some of the spectators whose cultivations were a little low directly fainted at the shock of these sounds!

But it seemed like nothing had happened on that stormy street. It seemed like besides the pouring rain, everything else was very quiet. Just where did this sound of clashing swords come from? Where was the sword that Zhu Luo's sword had encountered?

Those swords were all in the sheath of the Dragoncry dagger.

Chen Changsheng's one sword had always been ten thousand swords:

Those ten thousand swords which he had brought out of the Garden of Zhou.

Unexpectedly, they had all been sealed in the sheath by the Zhu Luo's sword.

But in the end, they had met.

The ten thousand swords could not leave the sheath, but they could still face the enemy.

Within the sheath, for a mere moment, it seemed like a great army was present, or a furious storm, or booms of thunder!

The ghostly sword in Zhu Luo's hand was presently sinking into Chen Changsheng's sheath.

It was not returning to the sheath, but rather incessantly getting shorter.

Brilliant little particles were being sent flying from the opening of the sheath.

Those were fragments of the sword that had been ground away.

Although the ten thousands swords were broken, their sword intents were still sharp. It was only an instant, but at least several thousand instances of grinding and hacking had occurred. How could Zhu Luo's ghostly sword possibly bear this? Even the real moon sword he held in his hands at the other end of the street was similarly growing shorter! Even more unimaginably, blood began to seep out from between the fingers of the hand that was holding the sword!

Zhu Luo's face became somewhat pale. Those eyes which had previously always maintained that godlike expression of indifference and dispassion once again revealed a tinge of confusion, which then swiftly transformed into a deluge of rage!

He could sense the swords within Chen Changsheng's sheath and could even recognize those famous swords of the past. There were even some Qis which he had been familiar with several hundred years ago. However, he was incapable of sighing with emotion at Chen Changsheng's fortuitous encounter, nor of inquiring about the truth of this matter, because those once incomparably powerful swords were attacking him at this very moment. Moreover, he had truly been wounded!

He had unexpectedly been wounded by an Ethereal Opening youth.

I don't care what sort of young genius you are.

I don't care that you are the youngest person to reach the upper level of Ethereal Opening in history.

In the end, you are only at the Ethereal Opening realm, only a youth of sixteen years old.

How could you wound me? How could you dare to wound me? I, one of the magnificent Storms of the Eight Directions, have actually been wounded by you. This is impermissible.

His enraged roar resounded through Xunyang City, instantly suppressing the clashing of the swords.

The rain clouds scattered and the moonlight shone even more brightly.

Zhu Luo took one step towards Wang Po, the sword in his hand slashing down.

Several dozen zhang away at the other end of the stormy street, his phantasm bent over Chen Changsheng and pressed down upon him.

That ghostly sword continued to stab deeper into the sheath.

Those brilliant specks of sword fragments shot out even more densely.

That brilliance, those sword fragments, were all the sharp intent resulting from sword intent hacking at sword intent.

It looked very beautiful, but it was actually incredibly dangerous.

The downpour had gradually slowed, but the puddles of water were still present. When those sword fragments landed, they actually cut apart the ripples.

This was not even mentioning the gray stone on the ground and the broken walls. There were fragments of stone everywhere.

Liu Qing stood up from the rain water and continued to stand guard in front of the horse, his sword bared before his body.

Those brilliant sword fragments shot forward like countless powerful arrows.

In a flash, his hairband was severed and his black hair floated up before also being cut apart.

His clothes were in thorough disarray and his body had gained several hundred more fine and tiny bloody holes. It was a very miserable sight.

But in the end, he had protected that horse as well as the person on the horse.

Su Li sat on the buckskin horse, his head lowered in silence.

Logically, Chen Changsheng should have already been dead at this point.

Both Su Li and Zhu Luo thought this way. But miraculously, despite being engulfed by this cloud of sword fragments, his body did not gain a single additional wound. A Qi emerged from some place and completely enveloped his body. That Qi... perhaps it had come from the jade ruyi on his waist, or maybe it had come from the string of stone pearls that had at some point appeared on his wrist.

No one could sense this Qi except for those sword fragments. Thus, when they approached Chen Changsheng's body, they very naturally floated away. All these details were completely hidden within the light.

And then, the rain came crashing back down, the rain clouds gathered back together, and the moonlight faded.

In the curtain of rain, Zhu Luo's phantasm gradually dimmed and grew brittle.

Ultimately, at some point, the ghostly sword had been completely swallowed by the sheath.

The phantasm abruptly crumbled away, turning into countless tiny bubbles.

Countless cries of shock arose within Xunyang City.

Zhu Luo stood on that end of the street, his body drenched in blood and his face pale.

His right arm faintly trembled. His sword was no more; only the hilt remained.

Just at this moment, Wang Po's blade finally arrived before him.

Chapter 419 - The Blade That Did Not Fall

Since the opening of the battle, this had been the first chance that Wang Po's blade had to approach Zhu Luo.

It was precisely at the moment where Zhu Luo had been sneak attacked, his body heavily wounded, his phantasm crumbled away, and he was forced out of his Moon in Water technique and back into his original body.

The blade rose up in the storm, incredibly straight and incredibly powerful.

Wang Po simply didn't care about all those things that had happened before. He ignored the bright moon in the rain, that assassin's two sneak attacks, and the unified clashing of Chen Changsheng's ten thousand swords. He just slashed down at Zhu Luo in front of him.

It was like he was cutting firewood, or even more like he was settling accounts, performed with absolute devotion.

This moment was perhaps his greatest opportunity to defeat Zhu Luo. It was perhaps even the only opportunity he would have while he still had not stepped into the Divine Domain.

Zhu Luo raised his palm to the sky and the dark clouds obscured the moon.

Nobody knew whether it would be the blade with Wang Po's full strength behind it or the palm that Zhu Luo hurriedly raised up after being heavily injured that would be stronger.

In the next moment, still nobody knew.

Because Wang Po's blade did not fall.

His metal blade paused in the air above Zhu Luo's body.

Zhu Luo's palm was also paused in the air.

The two did not meet.

The torrential rain had gradually come to a halt, but the street was still dark and gloomy, silent beyond compare.

It was like the scene had paused in time.

Not even the sound of breathing could be heard.

Zhu Luo stared at Wang Po in silence, but his complexion suddenly turned abnormally pale.

Countless powerful strands of Qi shot from the edge of his palm and his clothes and dispersed into the drizzle.

It was his remaining true essence after his heavy injury that he was now forcefully dispersing. Originally, it should have rested on Wang Po's blade, but he did not expect Wang Po to actually renounce his final chance and pause his blade in the air.

With a muffled hum, Zhu Luo's true essence was completely dispersed into the air, his Qi completely given over to the world.

He could not imagine that Wang Po would stay his blade because he was a completely different person from Wang Po.

Wang Po had restrained his blade not because he could calculate how the situation would develop, nor was it because his battle sense was so powerful that it could pierce through those dark clouds obscuring the moon. He had done so for a very simple reason.

Zhu Luo was injured. He did not want to take advantage of Zhu Luo in his time of difficulty.

He did not care about the best opportunity. He believed that as long as he could survive, there would be a day when he would step into the Divine Domain. And then, he would honorably defeat Zhu Luo and those other experts of the Divine Domain.

Thus, Wang Po restrained his blade.

And thus...Zhu Luo had suffered severe injuries, even worse than if you took Liu Qing's and Chen Changsheng's injuries and added

them together.

Blood oozed out from the corner of his lips and flowed out from his body, flowing out faster and faster.

In this world, there were many things that happened without any sort of reason.

But in fact, when you examined them very carefully, there were many reasons.

Under the gentle caress of the rain, the long street was silent.

Both the people present on the scene and the spectators of the battle said nothing.

Seeing the scene of Zhu Luo covered in blood, it was very difficult for anybody to say anything.

In these past several centuries, had anyone seen a powerful figure of the Storms of the Eight Directions lose at the hands of mortals?

Was there anyone that had seen Zhu Luo, this peerless expert, so miserable, so heavily wounded?

Zhu Luo's head was lowered, his long hair soaked by the rain and draped over his shoulders. Looking at the sword in his hand, he saw that only the hilt remained. This sword of moonlight was

forged from a great amount of refined essence steel and secret silver and was incredibly tough, but now it had become the dust in the cracks on the walls and the ground.

He lifted his head and looked through the light rain at Chen Changsheng. He asked, "An innate sword heart?"

At these words, the spectators that had been previously shocked by that simultaneous clashing of ten thousand swords were even more shocked.

Zhu Luo then turned to Wang Po and said, "Admirable."

In the entire continent, the number of people that could make Zhu Luo say the word 'admirable' was not more than five. Yet he had said it to Wang Po. Because in this battle today, Wang Po had displayed a powerful will and a battle strength that far surpassed his age. It was also because of the fact that Wang Po's final strike that did not fall was actually far more powerful than if his blade had actually struck.

Lastly, Zhu Luo turned to that end of the street where the blood-covered assassin stood in front of the horse.

Today in Xunyang City, the three people that defended Su Li had all been outstanding. If one were to discuss their contribution to injuring Zhu Luo, Chen Changsheng contributed roughly twenty percent, Wang Po's final strike that did not fall was fifty percent, and this assassin called Liu Qing contributed thirty percent. Considering the entire battle, Wang Po was the foundation, Chen

Changsheng was the final unexpected opponent, but Liu Qing was the crucial person that had caused Zhu Luo's plans to collapse.

The job of an assassin was to kill, so they naturally were not involved in anything constructive. In the annals of history, they had always appeared in the role of collapsing plans. The spectators in the distance followed Zhu Luo's gaze and rested on the assassin. When they thought about how both sudden changes in this battle had been because of this person, they were all extremely shaken. They thought, just what is going on here? Just who is this assassin? Just who would cultivate to the upper level of Star Condensation and still be willing to play the role of an assassin in the night? And just which assassin could actually calculate the details of the entire battle and successfully break Zhu Luo's control over Xunyang City?

Perhaps Zhu Luo had been too confident, or maybe it was because Wang Po was too strong and was not an opponent he could hold back against, but Zhu Luo did not care that he could easily kill Wang Po, as this would even allow him to avoid a few problems in the future. However, he could not allow Chen Changsheng to die. This assassin had counted on this point, so he launched his sneak attack in the pouring rain, every one of his attacks drawing blood, pushing Chen Changsheng to the precipice.

The Zhu clan was a major power of Tianliang County and its clansmen were numerous. Zhu Luo was not concerned about the Mount Li Sword Sect's retaliation nor the vengeful gazes of the southerners, but he had to consider the future of his clan. In the end, he also had to consider his reputation as well. Therefore, he did not want...to personally kill Su Li, so he had chosen to execute his Moon in Water technique and appear on that end of the street

to take Chen Changsheng away. He thought he could utilize the simplest trick to create the most ideal situation, leaving the assassin the opportunity to kill Su Li. Yet he had not imagined that the assassin had made him create this opportunity.

This was not an opportunity for the assassin to kill Su Li. It was... an opportunity for the assassin to kill him!

The minds of people, love and hate, pros and cons, aristocratic families, reputation, divinity—all of this had been accounted for in the assassin's calculations!

Chen Changsheng stood in front of that assassin, and so he naturally began to recall the words from Su Li's lessons. If an Intellectual Sword really did exist in this world, then shouldn't this be the true Intellectual Sword?

Zhu Luo's cold voice rang out in the cold drizzle, "Liu Qing, you actually dare to attack this elder?"

The crowd could not suppress their cries of surprise. Some of the people, who had planned to use the cover of the rain to continue attacking Su Li, subconsciously halted their steps. The people who knew of Liu Qing's name were not many, but those who knew of it knew what this extremely ordinary name represented—on the Ranking of Assassins, Liu Qing was the terrifying third-ranked assassin. Discounting that unpredictable and ghastly assassin on the top of the list, it could be said that Liu Qing was the most terrifying man on the continent.

All along, this assassin had been the legendary Liu Qing!

No wonder he even dared to assassinate Zhu Luo!

Zhu Luo looked at Liu Qing and said, "Did you really believe that there was no one in the world that could discover your background? Since you would actually dare reveal your own background, don't find it strange when this elder sends someone to Mount Li to dig deep!"

Liu Qing's mask was already torn. Pieces of skin and congealed blood could be seen all over it, making for an abnormally frightful appearance.

He looked at Zhu Luo and said, "I am not a person of Mount Li, so how can you find me there?"

Chapter 420 - A Friend Coming From The South

Hearing Zhu Luo's words, Chen Changsheng subconsciously turned his head around to Su Li and that assassin called Liu Qing.

Once he left the military fort on the border and had that encounter outside the forest, Chen Changsheng had become acutely aware that the frightening number three assassin in the world was following him and Su Li in the shadows. This fact made him feel very uneasy and placed an enormous psychological pressure on him. There were even times when he felt like he almost couldn't stand it anymore.

Only in the moment when he saw the smiles on Su Li's and that assassin's face and then saw that assassin's sword like a tree branch breaking through the reflection of the moon in a pool thrust into Zhu Luo's phantasm did he finally realize this assassin's actual purpose. This assassin had followed him and Su Li for so many days without attacking, not out of any terrifying endurance and patience, not because he was seeking an even better opportunity, but because he was protecting Su Li. He had been waiting for the most dangerous moment before he made his appearance!

Liu Qing actually knew the Sword of the Golden Crow! It must be known that the Sword of the Golden Crow was a secret technique created by Su Li. For it to appear now indicated that he and Su Li must necessarily be very close. In this case, what happened tonight in Xunyang City truly had been part of a plan, but it was not a plan concocted by the Great Zhou Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy; rather, it was Su Li's plan, a plan he had developed together with

this assassin.

This was what Chen Changsheng was thinking at the moment, and this was identical to what Zhu Luo and all the other spectators in the rain thought as well. But Liu Qing would not admit it, no matter how dazzling his Sword of the Golden Crow had been, even though embers were still drifting about in the drizzle.

He knew this sword technique of Mount Li, but he was not a person of Mount Li.

For some reason, the complete lack of persuasiveness in this reasoning made Chen Changsheng believe it. Zhu Luo naturally did not believe. He had made his own conclusion. It was just that there was currently no time nor any need to seek the truth behind it all.

Zhu Luo moved his gaze to Su Li, his expression cold, the moon-like expression in his eyes seeming almost ready to blaze.

He had come today to Xunyang City precisely to kill this person.

In the past, even as one of the Storms of the Eight Directions, he wouldn't dare claim that it was possible for him to beat Su Li. However, the entire continent knew that Su Li, in order to break through the demons' encirclement, had suffered severe injuries. He had originally thought killing Su Li would be an exceedingly simple affair, not even requiring his personal intervention. But now it seemed that even if he personally appeared, there was still not a guaranteed chance of success.

He had suffered a very devastating wound.

As expected, a person like Su Li was very difficult to kill.

For a similar reason, although he had also been heavily wounded, he was also very difficult to kill. In the pouring rain, Wang Po, Liu Qing, and Chen Changsheng's response could be said to be the most unyielding and the most intelligent, and could even be described as flawless. They had even managed to do the inconceivable and inflict a heavy wound on Zhu Luo, but they still could not kill him or make him admit defeat.

"I truly did calculate a few things incorrectly." Separated by a fine curtain of rain, Zhu Luo gazed at Su Li and said, "Everyone thinks of you as confident and casual, playing amongst the world, but in reality, you are proud and aloof, friendless in this world. Moreover, Mount Li is unable to send anyone to rescue you. But I did not imagine that there were actually people willing to help such a cold-blooded person as you."

These words were naturally speaking of Wang Po, Chen Changsheng and Liu Qing, especially the first two. Whether in temperament or anything else, they were extremely different from Su Li. Their way of conducting themselves and their goodwill to the world were what Su Li ridiculed and despised the most. Yet Chen Changsheng refused to abandon him and Wang Po was willing to journey thousands of li, all so that they could help him. It was as if they wanted to tell Su Li, this lonely star that killed without regard, that this world was not invariably cold, that there were always some people worthy of trusting.

"But you should well understand that they cannot save you."

Zhu Luo looked at the Yellow Paper Umbrella in Su Li's hands and then continued, "It's impossible for you to live past today. Your struggles are futile, only delaying."

Su Li quietly looked back and said nothing, perhaps out of disdain or some other reason.

"You delayed until Wang Po revealed his blade, delayed until that assassin revealed his sword, but so what?"

Zhu Luo gestured around him at the city and distant plains, both black as the night, and said, "Look at this world. Only a fool, a youth, and a ghost that can't even stand the light stand in front of you, while we are the entire world."

As he said these words, his feet gradually departed from the puddles of water and his body floated into the air. As his long hair danced behind him, a tyrannical Qi enveloped the entirety of Xunyang City. Blood flowed down from his chest and his mouth, plopping onto the ground ten-odd zhang below.

The drizzle finally ceased and the clouds parted once more, revealing a sky that could be real or unreal. It seemed to possess a moon. Countless sword intents descended like moonlight. Moonlight flowed through the street like water.

On the hard surface of the street appeared innumerable deep

crevices, all of them sword slashes.

This was the result of an expert of the Divine Domain displaying the full might of his Qi.

Zhu Luo was resolved to use his most powerful attack.

Wang Po suddenly opened his mouth and said, "Senior would not even hesitate to pay two hundred years' worth of life essence?"

Zhu Luo was already severely wounded. If he wanted kill with Su Li with absolute certainty, he would need to pay an even greater price. He looked at Wang Po and said, "Young master of the Wang clan, didn't you also pay twenty years' worth of life essence?"

Previously at the inn, Wang Po's single blade had heavily wounded Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun. It must be known that even though Wang Po was at the top of the Proclamation of Liberation, in reality, the three people were very close in strength. In order to go one against two and to cause his opponents to lose the strength to fight in the shortest time possible, he would naturally have to perform an extremely powerful secret technique, even one that could cause harm to himself.

For Wang Po to do this, he had paid a great price.

Back then, Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun had both been very shocked.

At this moment when he asked Zhu Luo a question, Zhu Luo had given him this question back in return.

After Wang Po's eyebrows were washed by the rain, they had grown even duller and droopier. After Wang Po's clothes had been soaked in the rain, he seemed even more poverty-stricken.

If he were an accountant, then the master that he served would already be bankrupt.

But the words he said were still calm and forceful.

"I am still young, but Senior is already old."

Time was the fairest and the unfairest.

Age was precisely Wang Po's greatest advantage over Zhu Luo.

Su Li, who had remained silent all this time, suddenly began to roar with laughter. His laughter contained a boundless joy.

And then, he said to Wang Po, "These old things can only die, not suffer defeat. You don't need to advise him."

Wang Po understood, as did everyone else on the rainy street. Tonight, if Zhu Luo retreated, then how could he maintain his hallowed position on the continent—how could he remain as one of the Storms of the Eight Directions?

Since he was one of the Eight Storms, he could never lose, only win.

Even if he had to pay two hundred years of his life.

Su Li's laughter echoed through the quiet Xunyang City, filled to the brim with derision for prestige and the continuance of family lines.

Zhu Luo suddenly gazed up at the night sky, a mocking smile on his lips.

Su Li's laughter abruptly ceased.

Zhu Luo said mockingly to him, "Could it be that you imagined that since we resolved to kill you, only one of these old things would come? You delayed so much that you ultimately delayed yourself into an abyss. Do you regret it?"

The rain over Xunyang City had already stopped and the clouds in the sky had scattered somewhat, but it was still gloomy and the time of day was unknown.

Half of the sky seemed to possess a moon, faintly discernible amongst the clouds.

On the other half of the sky, countless shining stars suddenly

appeared.

Chen Changsheng had no idea what was happening. Gazing up at that starry sky, he realized that his Fated Star was not there. He faintly understood those stars were unexpectedly all illusory.

Who had come? Who could cause such a strange phenomenon in the heavens?

Wang Po's expression became abnormally solemn. Liu Qing stood in front of Su Li, his head lowered, blood dripping down his face as he seemed to think about something. From the distant streets came the sounds of private discussions, occasionally punctuated with a cry of surprise. Liang Wangsun and Xue He showed rather strange expressions. Neither of them had thought that such powerful forces would appear tonight.

Hua Jiefu's complexion was a little pale. He thought to himself, what to do now?

A person had come to Xunyang City.

He had not yet appeared, but the sky had become a sea of stars.

A powerful spiritual sense gradually descended, and the pools of water on the street leapt up like they were boiling.

That person was called [Guan Xingke](#). He lived on the coast, or possibly in the Great Western Continent. Every night, he gazed at

the stars, something he had done for more than three hundred years now.

(Guan Xingke literally translates to 'star gazer'.)

That person was very close to Zhu Luo, so much so that they were called the Unrivaled Star and Moon. Of course, he was also one of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

Xunyang City was completely silent.

Wang Po turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "You should leave now."

Chen Changsheng's hand gripping the dagger was slightly trembling. "And what about you?"

Wang Po thought it over, then said, "I would like to try again."

Fully aware that he couldn't, yet still wanting to do it. Fully aware that he was no match, yet still wanting to fight.

In Wenshui, he had worked as an accountant for the Tang clan for three years, and his brush had not erred once.

Everything that he said, he would always do.

He did not believe that Su Li should die tonight, so he wanted to struggle until the end. But he did not believe that Chen

Changsheng needed to stay, because Chen Changsheng was just a youth and he still had much of his youth to squander, to experience.

Chen Changsheng very sincerely pondered, but he still could not decide whether to leave or not.

Today's rain was somewhat chilly, and Zhu Luo's sword had been very cold, but his blood was still hot.

In the end, he made a decision.

But everybody knew that his decision and even Wang Po's decision were both completely meaningless.

For Wang Po, Chen Changsheng, and Liu Qing to force Zhu Luo to this stage was already enough to be proud of. In addition, this battle in the rain would assuredly be recorded in the history book, but they could do no more than this.

Two experts of the Divine Domain simultaneously descended upon Xunyang City.

It had already been many years since there had been a scene like this.

Many people subconsciously turned to Su Li.

Those two Divine Domain experts had specifically come for him.

Suddenly, those people that wanted to kill Su Li were filled with reverence and admiration.

In order to kill him, the demons had plotted for many years, sent out every one of their experts, and surrounded the snowy plains with innumerable soldiers.

He had been severely injured, but if the human world wanted to kill him, they also had to move two of their most powerful experts.

This sort of life was truly something to be proud of, an incredibly glorious life. It could be said to have been lived with no regrets.

All these people wanted to know what a person like Su Li would say in the final moment.

Under the watch of countless gazes, Su Li finally opened his mouth.

He looked at Zhu Luo floating in the sky and asked, "Can you wait just a little longer?"

It seemed very much like he was acting out a comedic dialogue.

It was still a one-person comic dialogue.

Zhu Luo slightly arched his brows. "To continue delaying even now, it's somewhat out of sorts with your identity. Could it be that the Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li is also afraid of the sea of stars after death?"

"Correct, I am delaying." Su Li's voice was very calm. "From the military fort to Xunyang City, I've always been delaying, because this person lives very far away and requires a very long time to come over."

Zhu Luo asked, "You've always been...waiting for someone?"

Su Li replied, "Correct."

Zhu Luo asked, "Not Liu Qing?"

Su Li answered, "He's always been with me, so why would I need to wait? Moreover, I believed he had come to kill me."

Chen Changsheng couldn't help but shoot a glance at Liu Qing, thinking to himself, just what is the relationship between Su Li and this famous assassin?

After a moment of silence, Zhu Luo inquired, "Who are you waiting for?"

Su Li replied, "I'm waiting for a friend."

Zhu Luo said with derision, "You actually have a friend?"

If this question were asked to a normal person, it would seem particularly absurd. People lived on this world eating alike the five grains, dining on fresh vegetables and ripe fruit—how could one not have a friend? Whether it was a fair-weather friend or a friend you could go to a brothel with, in brief, they were all friends. But this question was asked to Su Li, so it was not absurd.

The entire continent knew that Su Li trusted no one and had no friends.

Even Chen Changsheng knew that he had no friends.

The disciples of Mount Li were people of his sect and could even be considered his family, but they were not friends.

Wang Po was not his friend, Chen Changsheng was not his friend, and it was very obvious that Liu Qing was also not.

To be precise, this world had many people that worshiped Su Li as a person.

But there were very few people with the qualifications to be his friend.

And in Su Li's view, those people were all old things, rotted wood, old bastards—

People such as Zhu Luo, such as that Guan Xingke who was almost about to arrive.

Zhu Luo was incredibly confident that those people qualified to be Su Li's friends, who were also the only ten-odd people on the continent able to change this situation today, would absolutely not befriend Su Li.

An even colder fact was that amongst the strongest ten-odd people in the world, the majority of them were Su Li's enemies.

Zhu Luo simply didn't understand who Su Li was waiting for. If his friend was some sort of peasant, then such a friendship was the stuff of legends, and was aesthetically rather meaningful, but just what meaning could it have now?

"Even a person like you can have friends, so how can someone as outstanding as me not have friends?"

Su Li looked at Zhu Luo and said derisively, "Idiot!"

As his words fell, the sea of stars over Xunyang City abruptly began to shake.

A dignified and pure, even holy, Qi obstructed all the pressure emanating from that sea of stars.

And then, a person from the south arrived.

The person that came was an old friend of Su Li's.

That person's white clothes floated in the air, and then instantly flew ten-odd li from the plains outside the city to within the city.

That person was a woman dressed in white ceremonial dress.

The dust of ten thousand li was all on her sleeve, her white clothes having already gradually become clean.

She rushed in front of Zhu Luo.

Zhu Luo let out a cry of extreme shock and then slashed at her!

The white-clothed woman lifted her hand, her sleeve gently waving.

With a single wave, the clouds in the sky contorted themselves.

Her pure clothes covered the moon.

The moonlight suddenly retreated.

And then Zhu Luo fell back, swiftly fell back, fell back ten-odd li until he finally heavily crashed against the city gate.

With a boom, dust was sent flying everywhere.

After Chen Changsheng had announced Su Li's presence, the city gate of Xunyang City had always been closed.

Now, the gate to Xunyang City was finally opened.

The city gate instantly collapsed.

On the ground covered with wood and bricks, Zhu Luo kneeled down and incessantly vomited blood.

On the street, that white-clothed woman slowly withdrew her finger and turned to Su Li.

This was a woman with a very ordinary appearance. On her face, one could faintly make out the light traces of time.

Just like the faint lines on the corners of her lips.

Chen Changsheng felt that this set of white ceremonial clothes was somewhat familiar.

The crowd was so shocked that their mouths were agape and they were lost for words.

Hua Jiefu, along with the priests he had brought into Xunyang City, one by one kneeled down to pay homage, shuddering and not daring to speak.

That white-clothed woman turned a blind eye to this. She only calmly gazed at Su Li and asked with a smile, "Just friends?"

Chapter 421 - The Holy Maiden Of The South

The white-clothed woman's smile was very light, like the clouds. It was very clear, like water.

But it contained a myriad of emotions.

There was nostalgia, there was teasing, and most deeply hidden, yet unable to be hidden at all, was a smear of disappointment and frustration.

One would be expected to be joyful at the arrival of a friend from afar, let alone the fact that this friend came at the moment of greatest peril and helped take care of one's most dangerous enemy. Yet Su Li's expression seemed rather distressed.

It might possibly have to do with that question the white-clothed woman had asked with a chuckle in her voice.

The clouds once again covered up the moonlight and starlight in the sky. The streets once more grew dim and the rain once more began to fall.

In the drizzling rain, he and the white-clothed woman looked at each other without speaking. Everything was quiet.

But in fact, at this very moment, the battle was still continuing.

The clouds were constantly twisting and roiling, as if countless thunderbolts lay within. That holy and dignified Qi wound around the moonlight like rosy clouds chasing the moon. It continuously pressed down and chased it, at the same time also pressuring those distant stars.

The shapeless thunder finally exploded through the clouds, sending countless dazzling bolts of lightning to the ground. Above Xunyang City, the thunder incessantly boomed and rumbled, shaking the world. Who knew how many normal people hiding under their beds were thrown into a panic? Who knew how many children ignorant to the world began to bawl out of fear?

The clouds were torn apart even more violently, almost as if the sky itself was about to be torn open. Those cultivators on the distant streets who had slightly weaker cultivations were shocked into unconsciousness by the sound of the thunder.

This was a battle of experts in the Divine Domain.

This was a collision of two forces at the world's most supreme level of strength.

The white-clothed woman had her back to the sky, not devoting an iota of attention to that battle occurring in the clouds which exceeded the limits of a normal person's imagination. She only calmly looked at Su Li.

The world was filled with thunder and lightning, and massive booms rang out without end.

The two still gazed at each other, not making a sound.

Eventually, the thunder and lightning finally ceased and a true peace settled over Xunyang City. The clouds gradually calmed, leaving behind only countless patterns akin to fish scales. Those were the remnants of those powerful collisions. On the street behind the white-clothed woman appeared countless cracks, like a field that had been plowed innumerable times. Countless trails of steam rose up from those cracks.

Just how deep did these cracks go? Could it be that they reached down to the lava underground?

Victory and defeat had already been assigned.

In fact, the moment this white-clothed woman arrived at Xunyang City, the victor and loser of this battle were already decided.

The crowd stared at this white-clothed woman in absolute shock. Besides shock, Chen Changsheng's mind was also filled with perplexity. He kept feeling that the white ceremonial garb this woman wore was rather familiar. Even her Qi seemed somewhat familiar, as if he had encountered it before. Just who was this white-clothed woman? She had actually been able to emerge victorious over the combined might of Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke, two of the Eight Storms. Even if Zhu Luo had been heavily wounded beforehand, the strength displayed by this white-clothed woman was still too frightening.

A man wearing a bamboo hat appeared at the gate of Xunyang City and helped Zhu Luo out of the ruins. Blood was flowing from this man's body, and it seemed like this blood was speckled with countless glistening fragments of starlight. That blood and those glistening stars gave off an especially terrifying feeling, as if only a single drop of this blood was enough to annihilate an entire city.

However, his bamboo hat had three enormous tears in it. It looked just like a palm fan that had been used for seventy years, so old that it couldn't bear the strain, that was then torn to shreds by a servant girl in a fit of anger. It had an abnormally miserable appearance.

This powerful man was naturally Guan Xingke. As for that white-clothed woman who could beat him into such a miserable state, who else could it be? He gazed at that street ten-odd li away, his face pale, stunned and furious.

Through the rain, Su Li aimed a smile at the city gate and said, "As I said, I do have a friend, it's just that she has relatively more matters to take care of and lives rather far away. To rush over requires some time."

These words caused an abnormal silence to fall over both the city gate and the streets. Everyone was very quiet.

At this time, Hua Jiefu had already brought all the priests in Xunyang City to kneel down in the rain and offer their obeisance. Besides Chen Changsheng who was lacking in knowledge of the

cultivation world, everyone had guessed at this white-clothed woman's identity.

Hearing Su Li's words, they could only keep their silence and even silently cursed.

Holy Maiden Peak was far in the distant south. Its distance from Tianliang County in the north was naturally very long.

For a powerful figure like this white-clothed woman, it was only natural that she had countless affairs that needed her attention.

In the ruins of the gate, Zhu Luo was finding it difficult to restrain his anger and shock. Wiping the blood from the corner of his lip, he said, "Just what is going on here?"

Su Li proudly declared, "I've also lived for several centuries. An outstanding existence like me will always get to know one or two friends. Do you think I'm Tianhai? That I enjoy living an isolated life?"

Such a proud appearance was rather repulsive in the eyes of many. But he was Su Li, so those people could only bear with it. However, Chen Changsheng had the feeling that there was something wrong with Su Li's emotions.

At this moment, the white-clothed woman sighed at Su Li, "So, it really was friends, huh."

Su Li's smile gradually faded, and he seemed rather embarrassed. This was the first time Chen Changsheng had seen the emotion of embarrassment on Su Li's face. Su Li was one of this world's peak human existences, and he was cold-blooded and emotionless, proud and unyielding. He held almost all the world's people in contempt, so just how could he get embarrassed? Previously when he ignored the white-clothed woman's question and decided to talk to Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke instead, this was already embarrassment, it was weakness. The white-clothed woman didn't even give him the chance to change the subject.

Su Li seemed quite helpless and said, "Junior Sister, don't be this way."

Chen Changsheng was incredibly astonished. In a very idiotic fashion, he thought, could this white-clothed woman be some expert Mount Li hid from the world?

"You would actually collude with this madman whose hands are drenched in blood? How can you be qualified to be the Holy Maiden!"

Zhu Luo's furious voice echoed throughout Xunyang City.

Xunyang City was deathly still.

No one answered Zhu Luo's question. No one dared to answer this question. No one had the qualifications to answer this question.

Chen Changsheng was dumbstruck, thinking that it was far too inconceivable. The white-clothed woman was...a supreme existence of the human world, one of the Five Saints? The Holy Maiden that was praised alongside the Tianhai Divine Empress?

Only now did he understand, in the south, the Holy Maiden Peak and the Longevity Sect were always regarded as being connected by a common root. The Mount Li Sword Sect and the South Stream Temple had an especially good relationship, often treating each other as fellow disciples.

For instance, Gou Hanshi addressed Xu Yourong as Junior Sister. Then Su Li could obviously address the present Holy Maiden as Junior Sister. But...like Zhu Luo had angrily exclaimed, just what was going on here?

"Why are they the Five Saints while you lot can only be the Storms of the Eight Directions?" Su Li looked at Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke and said mockingly, "Because you can never match up to those wily old foxes. Without first feeling out the cards in my hand, besides idiots like you, who would dare to so easily move against me?"

The Holy Maiden of the south glanced at him.

Su Li paused, then said, "My meaning is that your wisdom is not enough."

The Holy Maiden paid him no more attention. Turning to Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke, she calmly stated, "Whether or not I have

the qualification to be Holy Maiden is not something you two are worthy of deciding. As for Senior Brother, you always say that his two hands are drenched in the blood of the innocent, but if you ask yourself honestly, how can the number of people he has killed come close to those that you have killed? How can it come close to the number of people the Saints have killed?"

Guan Xingke bowed his head, obscuring his complexion under his dilapidated bamboo hat.

Zhu Luo flew into a fury at these words, shouting, "The Holy Maiden's words are too preposterous!"

The Holy Maiden serenely replied, "The various clans hold between them vast fields of fertile land and are served by countless servants. In times of famine, they have never decreased the rent. Just how many tenant farmers did they hound to death? The Saints are even worse. With a single, casual decree, just how many people will die guiltless? For my Senior Brother to not take up a position among the Eight Storms and to not become a Saint, this is true mercy. How can he be cold-blooded?"

The entire city was calm, every person wearing a thoughtful expression.

Su Li waved his hands and said, "Too much, it's a bit too much."

Chapter 422 - You Are Chen Changsheng?

Zhu Luo's voice was very angry and very severe. It was very difficult to prefix the word 'severe', but if one were to discuss the most fitting term, then nothing would be better than the word 'blood', just like how the cuckoo called so much that it began to cry blood.^[Note] It was just that this description did not match with his identity. Of course, if one associated this with his current enemy, that the target of his denouncement was the Holy Maiden of the south, then perhaps they would understand a bit more.

"In any case, you have violated the oath made by the Saints back then!"

Zhu Luo's enraged accusation echoed through the deathly silence of Xunyang City. This silence was completely different from that of Guan Xingke. When the people heard this accusation, the vast majority of them had no idea what this oath of the Saints was. They could only think of a statement enshrined in the highest laws of every country.

The rough meaning of this statement was this: heaven makes no distinction between north and south, the earth pays no regard to east and west. As long as they were within the united realm consisting of the human world and the land along the two shores of the Red River, those experts that had stepped into the Divine Domain were not allowed to argue with each other, much less engage in battle. Only if that Divine Domain expert had done something completely against the general interest of the alliance would conflict be allowed—this was the so-called oath of the Saints.

Considering it from the perspective of the humans and demi-humans uniting against the demons, this oath was undoubtedly very reasonable and also most necessary. The Holy Maiden's attacks against Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke were the firmest violation of this oath.

"Then what about you two? The entire world knows that although my senior brother is not one of the Saints nor one of the Eight Storms, his cultivation has long since stepped into the Divine Domain. For what reason can you attack him?"

The Holy Maiden gazed in the direction of the city gate and said, "Wang Po is one of the five young people that is most likely to step into the Divine Domain, and you would actually selfishly wish to kill him? Could this not be a violation of the oath we Saints made that year?"

Her expression and tone were both very serene, yet they naturally emitted a dignified and holy aura.

Zhu Luo furiously shouted back, "Wang Po is unaware of the big picture. As his senior, how is it selfish that I discipline him?"

The Holy Maiden calmly continued, "The Zhu clan of Tianliang County wants to endure throughout the ages, so how could you let Wang Po of Tianliang continue to mature? If you insist on concealing your own selfish motives, then perhaps it means you aren't even willing to face your true self."

Zhu Luo was exceedingly angry and was preparing to refute this, when the Holy Maiden continued, "All oaths are words from the heart. For the Pope and Senior Brother Mei's sake, I will not kill you today. Go."

Hearing these words, Zhu Luo's anger assaulted his heart and his injuries suddenly broke out, causing blood to flow out of him at an even faster rate. Guan Xingke, who had remained silent the entire time, saw this miserable scene, and then suddenly aimed a supercilious look at the dark clouds above Xunyang City.

This supercilious look was not friendly. It was loathing, it was disdain, and it was especially anger. Those low-hanging clouds suddenly seemed ready to part, and one could even make out the distant radiance of a few stars in the night sky!

The starlight erupted, shrouding all of Xunyang City, descending upon the soaked streets like the frost of an autumn day. A somber atmosphere pervaded the city.

Separated by ten-odd li, the Holy Maiden gazed at Guan Xingke over by the city gate, lifted her right hand, and pointed.

There was a shattering sound followed by countless more shattering sounds.

It was like the sound of some expert specializing in area attacks using a staff to break tens of thousands of porcelain vases at once.

It was also like the sound of the seas of consciousness of countless cultivators snapping—

Incomparably crisp, purifying the heart and moving the soul.

Crackcrackcrackcrack!

The snowflakes descending from the sky broke. The frost just congealing on the surface of the puddles broke.

In the ten-odd li between the Holy Maiden and the city gate, everything broke.

Guan Xingke's bamboo hat also broke into shreds. His lips, too, broke and began to bleed.

His heart, brimming with hostility and pride, in this instant, also finally broke. He no longer had any hesitation. Supporting Zhu Luo, he turned and began running out of the city towards that plain seemingly covered in the night, though no one knew what time of day it actually was. In a few seconds, he had vanished without a trace.

Xunyang City was incomparably quiet, as if there wasn't a single person within.

Those normal people that didn't have the ability to participate in this battle were all hiding in their own houses, on top of or within their kang, behind their windows or in front of their fences. They

were still frightened and anxious, even attempting to suppress their breaths.

Those cultivators that did have the ability to participate in this battle, those cultivators that wanted to kill Su Li, could also only follow in Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke's footsteps and depart, including such experts as Liang Wangsun and Xue He.

Hua Jiefu took the priests in Xunyang City and began to isolate the streets ravaged by the storm, leaving a silent and deserted space for a conversation to take place—the people worthy of remaining at the scene, besides Su Li and the Holy Maiden of the south, were naturally those three who used their lives and unimaginable will to protect Su Li so that he could live up to this point.

This plan had its origins in the events of the Garden of Zhou, the brush was put to the paper on the snowy plains with the encirclement of the demons, and then it persisted from the military fort down to this cold-blooded killing in Xunyang City, where it all finally came to an end. This assassination of Su Li finally had its conclusion—Su Li had not died and those people that wanted to kill him had all failed.

From the military fort to Xunyang City, he had been accompanied by Chen Changsheng all the way. However, he was keenly aware that the person that was ultimately able to resolve this problem was that friend of his which the entire continent was unaware of.

Of course, the word 'friend' here was open to question.

Perhaps truly because this status was open to question, Su Li was somewhat embarrassed. He gazed at the Holy Maiden, giving off a low-key yet very natural feeling, and said, "How come you came so late?"

Anyone who had just rescued another and then heard such accusing words would get very angry, but not the Holy Maiden. On the contrary, she very serenely replied, "I was delayed by someone for a while."

Serenity truly was a sort of strength, representing sincerity.

Su Li had felt this sort of strength many years ago, yet he still had no idea how to confront it. The so-called traveling the four seas and disregarding the affairs of the world was for the most part because he wanted to avoid this strength. Even now, he still had no idea how to directly face it, but he had at least learned how to change the subject.

"Who delayed you?"

The Holy Maiden did not directly answer his question, saying, "My disciple was heavily injured."

It was then that a rather uncertain but certainly concerned and shocked voice rang out.

"Xu Yourong was injured? She...is she okay?"

The person who asked this question was naturally Chen Changsheng.

The Holy Maiden's gaze rested on the youth's body.

She did not smile, not even the lightest of smiles.

She was very calm, and thus very dignified, solemn, and terrifying.

She asked, "You are Chen Changsheng?"

Chen Changsheng suddenly understood where the problem lay.

He had a very hostile relationship with Xu Yourong, hostile in every way. He had once thought that if he were a relative of Xu Yourong's, he would definitely have a very poor opinion of that youth called Chen Changsheng.

The Holy Maiden was Xu Yourong's teacher, the person that most cherished and doted upon Xu Yourong.

However, he had just experienced a grand battle and asked himself about his own life and death. At this point, he absolutely could not back down.

He looked at the Holy Maiden and said very sincerely, "Yes, I am

Chen Changsheng."

[Note]: The first part of this paragraph is rather difficult to translate. The word '厉' means 'severe' or 'critical' but when used in the term '凄厉', it means sad or bitter. But in this case, it says that the most fitting word is '血', blood, as in '血厉', and compares this to a line about cuckoo birds crying blood. This saying refers to how, back in ancient China, the cuckoo bird during the spring and summer would call out all night long. Because the cuckoo's beak was red, people mistook this as the cuckoo crying out so much that it was bleeding. 'Cuckoos crying blood' is a phrase meaning an extreme grief or sorrow.

Chapter 423 - A Chat About Life In The Sunset

The mood on the street had shifted too quickly. One moment it still seemed to be carrying on in a grand and majestic fashion, and in the next moment, it had somehow turned into a chat over wine in the sunset, settling into the rhythm of discussing everyday affairs. Of course, everyone knew that the Holy Maiden's questions had some other profound meaning.

In a normal situation, Chen Changsheng's reply was somewhat too firm and lacking in manners, but it was a beautiful thing that the Holy Maiden of the south was no normal person, nor was she like those ordinary Holy Maidens in history. She loved Su Li. She dared to love the Su Li that had loved a Demon Princess, so she was very satisfied with Chen Changsheng's reply. She thought that this youth was very calm, very simple, and very forceful.

She gave Chen Changsheng a profound glance. This was a true profoundness, not that sort of profoundness like the glance she had shot at Su Li, filled with complex emotions that everyone could understand—what impressions she had of Chen Changsheng before were unknown, but at least today, this meeting had left her relatively satisfied.

Maybe it had a lot to do with how Chen Changsheng stood, covered in blood, in front of Su Li?

As she gave him this glance, the rain over Xunyang City ceased. The clouds also scattered, revealing the true sky.

There was no Moon of the demons of the north, nor was there any rivers of stars. There was only the clear sky.

A setting sun was suspended in the distance over the plains outside the city. It had originally been twilight.

The bloody light of dusk fell upon the wounds and congealed blood on Liu Qing's face, adding several more layers of terror to it. He began walking towards the city gate, paying attention to no one else.

"Why?" Su Li asked to his back.

Liu Qing halted his steps, and then after a moment of silence, replied, "What I said to Zhu Luo was true."

Su Li retorted, "Of course I know what you said was true."

Not long after they had left the military fort, he realized that Liu Qing was following him. He had always thought that Liu Qing wanted to kill him and he had always not cared that Liu Qing wanted to kill him. Both of these had the same underlying reason.

He had known Liu Qing for many years. He knew Liu Qing's assassination habits and style. He knew everything about everything of Liu Qing.

Many years ago, he had taken leave of Liu Qing and those others without the slightest hesitation. He believed that he would never think about those guys again. In truth, in those endlessly long years, he really didn't think about them much. No matter how he looked at it, Liu Qing and those other guys all had reason to hate him, to want to kill him.

"I think differently from those guys. They always thought that everything was cleared up between our two parties, but I always believed that you owed us. Thus, if I wanted to kill you, this occasion was naturally the best opportunity."

Liu Qing did not turn around. After another pause, he said, "I originally thought you would be as miserable as an old dog, that I would definitely be elated to see such a sight, but as I followed you over these days, I felt more and more that I found no relish from this. You brought us into the profession. For you to suffer humiliation is for all of us to be humiliated. If someone wanted to kill you, then at least it has to be me. How could I let someone else touch you!"

After a moment of silence, Su Li replied, "What nonsense."

Liu Qing raised his head and watched the distant setting sun. "In fact, it's very simple. I just suddenly understood why you left us back then. In the end, you're a person of Mount Li. Your life and ours have always been different."

Previously in the battle, Zhu Luo had angrily accused Liu Qing of being a person of Mount Li.

Liu Qing did not admit it. Although he used the sword techniques of Mount Li, fair and above board, he was still an assassin that walked in the night.

Hearing Liu Qing's words, Su Li settled into a very sincere silence. Afterwards, for the first time, he gave an explanation for that period of his past which he felt to be a trifling concern, a part of his life which his younger self had not paid much attention to.

"I left back then primarily because it wasn't challenging anymore."

He continued, "Or do you mean that I should have spent every day thinking about how to kill the Demon Lord and Black Robe?"

Liu Qing gazed at the setting sun and very earnestly replied, "The last mission we took, the final thing we chatted over, wasn't it rather interesting?"

Even when confronting the two powerful experts of Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke, Su Li had still given off an undisciplined and indifferent air, but upon hearing Liu Qing's words, his expression grew solemn.

He stared at Liu Qing and said, "That woman is difficult to kill. I advise you all not to think about it."

Liu Qing said no more and began walking out of the city. In a

short time, he had disappeared into the twilight.

Chen Changsheng didn't quite understand this conversation. He asked Su Li, "What were you two talking about?"

Su Li replied, "Many years ago, someone requested that I kill a person."

"Kill who?"

"You know of it, Tianhai."

In Su Li's view, the world's strongest women were three and a half: the Divine Empress, the Holy Maiden of the south, as well as the demi-human empress in White Emperor City, and then there was also that mutant in Xuelao City.

But the most difficult to kill had always been that one.

Of course, it was Tianhai.

"Wasn't it the elders of the Longevity Sect that tried to force Senior to do it?"

"There were also people that attempted to pay me to do it."

"Truly insane."

"No matter the person, they all have a price."

"Senior, these words seem to be more fitting coming out of Liu Qing's mouth."

"Is my saying it very strange?"

"Senior, you and Liu Qing...just what's the relationship between you two?"

"He became an assassin because of me, and his skills were taught by me."

Su Li's answer was very casual, as if this matter was a trivial affair that wasn't even worth mentioning.

Chen Changsheng suddenly thought of a matter, a certain possibility.

Back then in the wilderness when they had encountered the twenty-eighth Divine General, Xue He, with Su Li's guidance, he had cut off Xue He's arm. He was concerned that Liu Qing, concealed in the plains, would opportunistically kill Xue He, at which point Su Li had explained Liu Qing's origins, at the same time mentioning that assassin who ranked at the very top of the Pavilion of Divination's Ranking of Assassins. Su Li had spoken of this number one assassin with quite some respect.

Chen Changsheng stared at Su Li and asked incredulously, "Could it be...Senior is that world's number one assassin?"

"When I was young, I worked that profession for a time."

"And then?"

"To do a job, you must love a job, to carry it out to the pinnacle."

Su Li acted as if it was only right. "As an assassin, it's only natural that I be the strongest assassin."

Chen Changsheng was incredibly shocked, incapable of comprehending just why such a talented person above the affairs of the world would go and be an assassin.

Su Li glanced at the Yellow Paper Umbrella in his hands and sighed regretfully, "At that time, I really was lacking money."

He did not finish the sentence—back then, he had been so lacking in money that he didn't even have the money to buy a shabby old umbrella.

Some questions had now been easily resolved.

At the time, Chen Changsheng had felt something was off. How could Su Li admire an assassin, even if it was the world's greatest assassin? Now he understood that the so-called admiration was

still merely a bout of narcissism.

The twilight gradually dimmed, no longer seeming like blood and taking on a warmer tone.

An extremely pure ray of light slowly entered Wang Po's body, and his wounds visibly closed up.

Previously in the inn, in order to defeat Painted Armor Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun in one stroke, Wang Po had paid a massive price. After that, in order to block Zhu Luo, he had suffered heavy wounds. Now, these injuries were basically all healed, though it was unknown whether the damage to his life essence could be recovered.

In the hands of the Holy Maiden, the Sacred Light technique truly was close to a divine technique. Comparing it to the Sacred Light technique of the priests of the Li Palace, the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, and the South Stream Temple, was like the difference between a star and a firefly.

Wang Po stood up and bowed to the Holy Maiden in thanks.

He didn't even glance at Su Li because he had never liked Su Li. He had come to Xunyang City for his own affairs and principles, not for this person.

He walked over to Chen Changsheng and said, "We met once before."

Several months ago, by the main gate of the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng and Wang Po happened to meet once.

That night was the night that Xun Mei intruded upon the Divine Path, lost, and died.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yes, Senior."

Wang Po's eyebrows powerlessly drooped, seeming to be lacking somewhat in spirit, as was his voice. "You're not bad."

Chen Changsheng felt very happy, because he thought that Wang Po truly was a very good senior.

Many young geniuses worshiped Su Li, but he did not. He thought Su Li was very annoying, even though Su Li had taught him a lot. He felt that compared to Wang Po, Su Li was riddled with flaws, even though Su Li was far stronger than Wang Po. In his sixteen years of life, he had only worshiped his senior brother Yu Ren. Now it seemed like he had added a person called Wang Po to his objects of worship.

On the other side, Su Li finally asked that question, "How is my family's girl doing?"

The Holy Maiden replied, "Mount Li sent a letter, there shouldn't be any big complications."

Su Li asked, "Then what about Mount Li?"

The Holy Maiden answered, "I left in a hurry. I only know that there are some problems."

Su Li's eyebrows rose up like swords, then gradually descended. After a moment of silence, he said, "Qiushan is there, it should be fine."

When Chen Changsheng heard this name, he subconsciously glanced over.

Chapter 424 - The Setting Sun Is Not Usually Seen In The Early Morning

Chen Changsheng had never met Qiushan Jun before. He could only guess from the stories told to him by Gou Hanshi and the others, and the praise of the common people, what sort of person Qiushan Jun was. Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, Qi Jian, and the rest, were all very extraordinary people in his eyes, each having aspects that were worthy of learning from. However, when they talked about Qiushan Jun, they very naturally spoke of him with an absolute sense of trust.

This was a very frightening affair. That Su Li would now state that as long as Qiushan Jun was there, Mount Li would undergo this strife with no difficulties, this sort of trust was even more terrifying. It must be stated that no matter how outstanding Qiushan Jun was, he was still a young man that was not fully twenty years old. For what reason would Su Li be so assured that as long as Qiushan Jun was there, Mount Li would not fall into chaos? He didn't understand, or perhaps it was better to say that he began to lose confidence in himself.

Wang Po looked into his eyes and very earnestly said, "Qiushan Jun is truly very good."

The entire continent knew of Chen Changsheng's engagement, such that even Wang Po found it very interesting. Many people wanted to know just what sort of story Chen Changsheng, Xu Yourong, and Qiushan Jun—these three most outstanding figures of their young generation—would produce in the future. Wang Po rather admired Chen Changsheng, so he wanted to inform this

youth just how amazing this future opponent was.

Chen Changsheng didn't really know how to respond.

Su Li said, "He's not up to Qiushan's level, at least right now."

Wang Po replied, "Although he's not as good, he's also not too far. Moreover, whether he's good enough or not has never been our problem."

These words concealed a deeper meaning, but Chen Changsheng heard it loud and clear.

On a certain level, he and Wang Po shared a connection, even though they were still actually strangers to each other.

Wang Po clasped his hands in respect towards Chen Changsheng, and then bid him farewell.

Su Li abruptly said, "Somehow, I feel somewhat unhappy."

The Holy Maiden smiled at him. "Jealous?"

Su Li replied, "What are you saying?"

The Holy Maiden answered, "Chen Changsheng and Wang Po are people going the same way, but you are not."

Su Li somewhat helplessly replied, "That kid Qiushan is also not much like me."

The Holy Maiden replied, "There is a young person very similar to you."

"Who?"

"The Old Master of the Tang clan's grandson, Tang Tang."

Su Li said in disgust, "What I detest the most are people of the Tang clan."

The Holy Maiden stated, "What people detest the most is often themselves."

Su Li sneered, "Junior Sister has lived on Holy Maiden Peak for too long. Your words are becoming more and more uninteresting."

The Holy Maiden smiled. "Then wouldn't it be good if Senior Brother took me traveling through the four seas?"

Thus, there were no more words.

Wang Po also had nothing more to say. He turned around and began heading out of the city, his tall and thin body slightly crooked. He didn't seem at all like the expert that sat at the top of

the Proclamation of Liberation, not at all like that courageous warrior that had just taken part in a majestic battle. He just seemed like an impoverished accountant.

Looking at his back, Su Li asked, "Do you know why he's called Wang Po of Tianliang?"

This question was naturally asked to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I don't want to know."

Su Li was somewhat surprised and somewhat annoyed.

Chen Changsheng was more concerned about another problem. "Why is it that he seems to not really want to talk with you?"

Su Li got even more irritated. "That boy never liked me, so it's only natural that he doesn't want to talk with me."

Wang Po's blade cultivated the straight path. He didn't like Su Li, so he would ignore Su Li, not caring for the fact that Su Li was Su Li. Similarly, if he wanted to save Su Li, he would go save Su Li, even if Su Li was Su Li. Just as stated before, he focused on the situation, not the person.

Just as Chen Changsheng was preparing to say something more, he noticed that the Holy Maiden had been quietly standing by Su Li's side, not interrupting or making any movements. She was just like a little bird calmly resting on a wutong tree. Who could have

imagined that Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li, widely known as being cold-blooded and murderous, would actually have this sort of relationship with the pure Holy Maiden of the south?

Su Li knew what he was thinking about and said, "No person truly lives cut off from others, besides that empress of yours."

This was already the second time he had made such a judgment, and Chen Changsheng didn't know if there was any sort of deeper meaning behind it or not.

The Holy Maiden had been observing Chen Changsheng all this time. She felt that when compared to Su Li, this youth seemed too overly dull, and similarly did not match up to Qiushan Jun's graceful manner. He could only be said to be barely satisfactory. But she soon after thought, perhaps this is my obsession causing trouble. Perhaps it's affecting my judgement? Thus, she had not conveyed her evaluation.

The thing called obsession could not be asked for.

Back then, for all sorts of complicated reasons, she and Su Li could not be together. It was impossible for them to be together, so much so that they hadn't even met with each other over these past few years. It was to the extent that in both the South Stream Temple and the Mount Li Sword Sect, no one knew of their relationship. So on Xu Yourong's engagement, she had always had a certain opinion. She felt that Xu Yourong could marry Qiushan Jun.

Because Qiushan Jun truly was sufficiently outstanding, even perfect. He was a perfect match for her own female disciple. In addition, the whole continent knew that, although there was nothing official, the true successor of Su Li in Mount Li was precisely Qiushan Jun.

To hope that the next generation could complete what she herself could not was also a sort of obsession.

With this thought, she inadvertently glanced at Su Li, her eyes still as complex as the sea of stars.

"Although I don't much like this kid, I have to admit, he's not any lesser than Qiushan." Su Li looked at her and smiled. "I got in an argument with Wang Po on purpose because I couldn't stand to see his lifeless face."

The Holy Maiden replied, "Qiushan is your successor."

Su Li looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "On this journey, I also taught him a few things."

The Holy Maiden had an acute understanding of just how proud Su Li was, just how lofty was his gaze, and so she couldn't help but feel somewhat astonished. Turning to Chen Changsheng, she smiled and said, "If that's the case, then I have to regard you even more seriously."

To receive these words from the Holy Maiden, anyone would feel

proud. And if Chen Changsheng wanted to marry Xu Yourong, the meaning contained within the Holy Maiden's words would make him even happier. But now as he looked at the white clothes of the Holy Maiden, he subconsciously recalled those white clothes in the Garden of Zhou and that young girl. As a result, a sentence slipped out of his mouth.

"My lady has misunderstood. I have not made up my mind yet on this engagement."

As he finished saying these words, Chen Changsheng's mood became somewhat peculiar, as if he had returned to a year ago in the estate of the Divine General of the East back at the capital. He felt somewhat relieved, and yet for some reason, he felt a sense of disappointment, like he had lost something.

Perhaps he no longer needed to burden himself with any of this. It had always been the case that there would be those sets of emotions that were completely at odds with each other.

In that moment when the Holy Maiden's attitude towards him had just changed, he had brought up the matter of ending the engagement. The Holy Maiden would certainly be angry and he did not dare look at her in the eye. Turning to Su Li, he said, "Senior, once you return to Mount Li, I would trouble you to take care of that matter as soon as possible."

He was obviously speaking of the matter of Liang Xiaoxiao using his death to accuse those three people of colluding with the demons.

Su Li said nothing. Qi Jian was his daughter. It was a given that he would resolve this matter.

Chen Changsheng suddenly thought of another matter. He looked at Su Li and sincerely said, "Senior, I won."

They had gone from the snowy plains of the demon realm to the world of humans, and then there was that assassination attempt in the military fort, followed soon after by the pursuit of the Great Zhou Cavalry into the snow-covered woods.

At the time, Chen Changsheng and Su Li had a conversation and then discussed the same topic several times afterwards—a conversation concerned with the world and the hearts of people.

Su Li believed this world to be ice-cold. Chen Changsheng believed the world to be warm. Su Li believed the hearts of people to be sinister and vicious. Chen Changsheng believed that not all people's hearts were like so. They had not made any bet, but each knew what the other was thinking. Finally, in the middle of that lovely spring sunshine, Chen Changsheng had opened the window to the streets of Xunyang City and loudly shouted out those words, revealing the dice under the cup.

Chen Changsheng believed that he had won.

Su Li replied, "Just like Zhu Luo said, in the entire world, there was only a fool, a youth, and a ghost that can't even stand the light."

Chen Changsheng replied, "But ultimately, there was a fool, a youth, and in addition, that ghost that couldn't stand the light really did appear in the full light of day and stood in front of you."

That assassin that had followed them for several weeks, in Chen Changsheng's view, was a very beautiful thing, a very warm story.

He said, "The facts testify that human nature is good."

Su Li shook his head. "I still don't think that's true."

Chen Changsheng answered, "But at least there is a good side, just like how Senior is decisive and murderous, disdaining the world, but also has a good side."

Su Li arched his brows. "We're not frying rice cakes here, where did all these sides come from? Do you want to add an egg too?"

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then by that hot spring in the snowy mountain ridge, why did Senior try to deceive me? Why did you not hesitate to play the part of a vile man to enrage and threaten me so that I would leave? Senior could have just told me."

This was a question that he had asked Su Li at the very beginning, but Su Li had never answered.

Su Li gazed into his eyes and said, "It's not because I am a good

person, but because you are a good person, because you are a real person. If I were to straightforwardly tell you to leave, you definitely wouldn't leave."

Chen Changsheng fell silent for a few moments, then said, "But Senior still wanted me to leave, not wanting to drag me down."

He believed that this was the best evidence.

Su Li was a good person.

For some reason, he was particularly obsessed with proving this point.

Su Li was rather annoyed by his pestering. He said, "I'm not a good person. I just believe that in the future, you young ones will definitely be stronger than our generation, so I don't want you to die too early."

"Ah?"

"Humans are a very interesting existence. They always love to grow nostalgic over the old ways, thinking that old is good and the past is perfect. But I don't think this way. I believe that each generation will always be stronger than the previous. My master was stronger than the founding ancestor of the Mount Li Sword Sect, and I am stronger than my master, so I must be stronger than old man Yin and Zhu Luo's generation. Wang Po and the rest will definitely be stronger than my generation, and Qiushan and your

generation will necessarily be stronger than theirs. Only by believing in this point and striving for it can humans continue to exist on this continent, and to live better and better."

The setting sun had not yet sunk below the horizon. Xunyang City was somewhat gloomy, but it didn't make anyone feel sad. On the contrary, it was very much like early morning and very much like Su Li's words, brimming with the vivid air of life.

"Which is why Senior has always been helping and instructing me."

"Yes, compared to those old things, I look even more favorably upon you young ones."

"Which is why back then, Senior did not kill Liang Wangsun and Liang Hongzhuang, and even allowed Liang Xiaoxiao into the Mount Li Sword Sect? Which is why previously in that dangerous situation at the inn, Senior did not use his final attack on Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun?"

"Maybe, but who told you that was my final strike?"

"But, why doesn't Senior like those old people?"

"Those old people...are old, rotted, lifeless. They don't know how to advance, only how to play around with schemes and plots. They aren't shining, they aren't open and honest, they aren't clear-minded, and so they aren't sharp. Without a sharp strength, they

have no meaning to humans, so I will continue to watch them. And you people, you should quickly prop up."

"Prop up?"

"Yes, to prop up the heavens and stand firm upon the earth."

Saying these words, Su Li and the Holy Maiden, shoulder to shoulder, walked out of Xunyang City.

Chen Changsheng stood behind them.

Hua Jiefu and his priests stood at an even farther place.

The setting sun was like the morning sun, the night wind cool like the morning breeze, and the remaining drops of rain on the street seemed very much like the dew. These things he had experienced from the Garden of Zhou to Xunyang City were not at all like a dream. They were as vivid as the wounds on his body. However, he had this vague sense that he had forgotten one very important thing.

He did not know that back in the capital, a storm was waiting for him.

He only wanted to remember what that thing was.

And then, he remembered.

He faced the setting sun and yelled at Su Li's back, "Senior...that umbrella is mine."

Chapter 425 - Returning To The Capital Amidst Life And Death

Chen Changsheng was about to return to the capital. Hearing this news, Zhuang Huanyu fell silent for a very long time, just like a few days ago when he heard that Chen Changsheng was still alive.

Once their group that had gone to the Garden of Zhou left Hanqiu City and returned to the capital, the Imperial Court removed Zhexiu from the Li Palace. Everyone believed that Chen Changsheng had died with the collapse of the Garden of Zhou. Qi Jian, who had been returned to Mount Li, was still in a coma. Moreover, matters between man and woman were the most liable to cause quarrels, and so he believed that no one would ever believe Zhexiu and Qi Jian's defense. Thus, he was very happy, thinking that his life had finally returned to the right track. It was just that, from time to time, he would think of Liang Xiaoxiao—that young genius who had used the final move of the Mount Li Sword Style to commit suicide in front of him. When he recalled this, his body would grow cold, and he couldn't feel warm no matter how many blankets he covered himself with. It was like some devil's shadow was quietly standing over his body in the air around him.

Yet what made him feel even colder was that Chen Changsheng had not died.

He had appeared in the wilderness in the northern stretches of Tianliang County. It was said that he was together with that legendary Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li. Soon after, he heard that Divine General Xue He had gone there, but Chen Changsheng

still did not die. They had gone to Xunyang City, and then after that, Liang Wangsun and Painted Armor Xiao Zhang appeared. Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke, two of the Storms of the Eight Directions, appeared. And yet, Chen Changsheng still did not die...why didn't he just die?

Zhuang Huanyu stood in a courtyard, gazing upward at the pitch-black abyss of the night sky. He voiced aloud, "Why don't you just die?"

He stared at the night sky in silence for an interminable amount of time, then muttered to himself, "No one will believe it."

Several months ago, following behind that night in which Wang Zhice lit up the capital as he comprehended the Dao, the capital of the Great Zhou was once more bathed in silver starlight. This was because Chen Changsheng was in the Mausoleum of Books, viewing the monoliths and cultivating. After that night, the entire continent knew of the meritorious deed he had accomplished for the human world, and they also knew of the Li Palace's true attitude towards him.

Chen Changsheng became the youngest Principal of the Orthodox Academy in history. The Pope had chosen him to be his successor. He was the inheritor of the Orthodoxy.

No one believed that the successor to the Orthodoxy would collude with the demons, because it was impossible for the Demon race to provide him with any greater benefits. If he had died in the Garden in the Zhou, then maybe it would have profited a few people that were still alive, and then maybe some people would be

willing to believe. However, Su Li had lived and returned to Mount Li. Chen Changsheng had lived and was returning to the capital. Then all this was about to come to a close. The scheme Liang Xiaoxiao had woven with his own death was visibly about to collapse. Of course, there were also people who held different views on this, such as that terrifying Lord Zhou Tong.

This was because Zhou Tong knew that Chen Changsheng was Daoist Ji's student. He believed that for the sake of revenge, Daoist Ji would not only collude with the demons, he would even be willing to bring the entire human world to ruin. But Zhuang Huanyu did not know of these matters, so as more and more news of Chen Changsheng's journey back south was relayed to the capital, he grew more and more silent. He no longer left his own small courtyard, and his confident figure could no longer be seen amongst the verdant trees of the Heavenly Dao Academy. He was finally beginning to understand why, after he saw Zhexiu carry Qi Jian into the Mountainside Whispering Wood, Liang Xiaoxiao chose to die with such determination.

Besides dying, what else could be done?

He lowered his head, gazing at the dark well in the courtyard, seeing the dim reflection of the starlight in the water deep within the well. Suddenly, he began to shiver.

He had grown up in the countryside, he and his mother relying on each other to survive. He lived a poor and destitute life, bitterly studying without end. After coming to the capital and entering the Heavenly Dao Academy, because his father was the Vice Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy and also because he possessed an

outstanding talent, he received the love of his teachers and the respect and adoration of his schoolmates. However, he had never relaxed the requirements he placed upon himself. Even on cold winter days, he would persist in using cold well water to wash himself.

Now, it was the twilight of spring, and the capital was rather sultry, even feeling somewhat like summer. Yet he still felt that water in the well to be somewhat cold.

That sort of cold made people fall into fear, into despair.

He stared into the depths of the well, his face growing ever paler. After a seemingly endless span of time, he finally turned and left the side of the well.

This was the first time in many days he had left the small courtyard in which he lived. As he walked, the students of the Heavenly Dao Academy that he encountered showed astonishment on their faces, then gave way for him, paying their respects. Zhuang Huanyu seemed to not even see them, nor did he speak to his schoolmates. He directly walked to a building in the depths of the Heavenly Dao Academy.

This was the residence of the Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy. In the past, Mao Qiuyu had lived here. Later on, Mao Qiuyu went to the Li Palace to take charge as Archbishop of the Hall of Subjugation, and this place became the residence of the newly appointed principal.

The newly appointed Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy had the surname of Zhuang. It was his own father.

Standing outside the residence, separated by a sparse screen of plum branches, he gazed at the lights in the building and the figure of that man. Zhuang Huanyu once again fell into a very long silence, his face no longer as pale as it was before.

Back then, his father abandoned his wife and child and entered the capital to take the imperial examinations, having some sort of affair with that girl from the Wenshui Tang clan. This was the worst ingratitude—this was a story that Zhuang Huanyu had persistently believed, and this was the opinion he had always held of his father. As a result, he had always harbored a deep loathing and hostility towards his father, and as a consequence, whenever he confronted his father, he would always become extremely brave.

He didn't know why he came here tonight, but he realized that because of his anger towards that man behind the window, the despair and coldness in his heart had actually improved!

Afterwards, he left the Heavenly Dao Academy and walked to the stone pillars in front of the Li Palace. There, his footsteps stopped. He no longer moved forward.

He was an outstanding talent of the Heavenly Dao Academy, and also a highly valued member of the next generation nurtured by the Orthodoxy. He was worthy enough to walk into the Li Palace, but he did not. He had not come to the Li Palace to take in the sights, even though he did get to see the last few cherry trees in the

night. He had come to the Li Palace to see someone, but even if he were to walk into the Li Palace, it was impossible for him to see that person, just as even though he was the genius Zhuang Huanyu, he was also not worthy of approaching that person. Just as back in the Heavenly Dao Academy, it was only in Mao Qiuyu's residence when he was principal that he could see that fairy-like junior sister, and then watch as she departed like a fairy.

Standing in front of the Li Palace, he quietly gazed through the darkness at the Hall of Pure Virtue, imagining that junior sister's life in the Pope's Green Leaf World. Zhuang Huanyu began to recollect the past.

He wanted to sort out what happened over these past few years, to make clear just how all these things had happened.

Several years ago, he had met her in the Heavenly Dao Academy. Then, they met once again at the Ivy Festival. When he thought that they could get to know each other, he saw that she was pulling along a youth called Chen Changsheng by the sleeve.

Yes, everything had originally started from here.

In the Garden of Zhou by the lake, when Liang Xiaoxiao had suddenly launched his sneak attack and it was clear that the demon experts wanted to kill Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu, and Qi Jian, he was in the forest, not brandishing a sword and not meeting up with them.

Yes, because he had been scared, because he was just a youth,

because he wanted to live.

But now that he thought about it, wasn't it because, in his heart, he had always held a deep jealousy and hatred for Chen Changsheng?

He really wanted Chen Changsheng to die.

Why couldn't he just die?

A rain suddenly began to fall down upon the capital. The Li Palace was no exception.

The air of late spring was suddenly washed clean, and the gray stone actually began to emit a cold air.

Zhuang Huanyu had no umbrella. He stood in the rain for a very long time.

A priest from the Li Palace stepped forth to inquire, but when he realized it was him, he remembered that Chen Changsheng was about to return to the capital. Thinking that he had guessed at something, the priest no longer disturbed Zhuang Huanyu.

Holding up umbrellas in the rain, those priests and students from the Six Ivies walked about their business. When they saw his drenched figure, the emotions in their eyes were rather complex. There was some pity, some empathy, and of course, there was also ridicule.

Zhuang Huanyu returned to his small courtyard in the Heavenly Dao Academy.

His clothes had been completely soaked by the rain, so how could he care anymore whether something was cold or hot? Yet for some reason, in the end, he did not jump into the deep and cold well.

In the final moment of his life, he preserved a little of his pride. He used a sword.

He chose to die under his own sword.

The news of Zhuang Huanyu's death quickly spread throughout the entire capital.

That gray courtyard not far from the Imperial City was the first to receive this news, because this place was the Department for Purging Officials.

When Zhou Tong heard this news, he had been holding up a lantern, standing amongst a patch of green wormwood in his vegetable garden. He had been attempting to find that wormwood stick-bug that had bitten one of his wormwood stalks half to death.

Zhuang Huanyu's death naturally had to do with Chen Changsheng's return to the capital. Those who stood on Chen Changsheng's side presumably felt like they could hold their heads up high, while those wanted to use this matter to attack Chen

Changsheng and even the Orthodoxy inevitably felt rather disappointed.

Zhou Tong was likely the only person in the world that actually believed Chen Changsheng could collude with the demons, but not only did he lack any sense of failure, he even laughed and said, "It's good if he dies!"

He was truly happy. Although he didn't laugh so much that he was rocking back and forth, the lantern in his hand swayed to and fro, so much so that the shadows of the wormwood on the vegetable field created all sorts of shapes, seeming just like a fence.

After the conclusion of the matter in Xunyang City, once it was confirmed that Su Li and Chen Changsheng had both survived, the rumors coursing their way through the capital suddenly changed.

The Li Palace and the military placed an enormous pressure on the Department for Purging Officials, demanding that Zhou Tong release Zhexiu.

Liberating Zhexiu was a present, a great gift to welcome Chen Changsheng back.

Of course, Zhou Tong would definitely not release Zhexiu. If not for Chen Changsheng's status being too sensitive, he would definitely have locked Chen Changsheng in that prison in his front yard.

So he believed that Zhuang Huanyu had died well. He had died, and the dead could not testify. The dead could not testify, so it was good.

Of course, he was keenly aware that with Chen Changsheng's current status and identity, Zhuang Huanyu's death was not too significant.

But there were definitely people that would use this death.

The fresh rain moistened the dust of the capital. The spring feeling of the capital had not yet dulled, and, on the contrary, grew even deeper. It was so bright and beautiful that it even seemed somewhat sticky and greasy.

A convoy of carriages returned to the capital.

Chen Changsheng sat in one of the carriages, feeling the vibrations from his sheath. Knowing that the Black Dragon was about to wake up was very comforting to him.

Then, he heard a voice coming from outside.

"Traitor!"

Many people knew that Chen Changsheng was in the carriage. The commoners who were used to the bustling sights of the capital also couldn't help but fill the two sides of the road to join the rest of the crowd. There was spirited discussion, producing quite the

clamor, and the scene was incredibly lively.

When this word rang out, this great street of the capital instantly became eerily silent.

Chapter 426 - Paying Respects To The Pope

"The word 'traitor' was truthfully not the most fitting, or perhaps it would be better to say that it was not accurate enough. In this story, it was much more appropriate to use 'spy' or some other word, such as this second set of words which broke the silence hanging over the crowd: "Chen Changsheng you scoundrel! You would actually collude with the demons to harm the outstanding talents of Mount Li, and now you have even hounded Lord Huanyu to death!"

"Hounded to death? I think some powerful figure used some shady method! This was a shameless assassination! It's too disgraceful!"

"Just what nonsense are you all blabbering?"

After viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng was no longer the object of the capital's hatred and animosity. There were already many people treating him as the glory of the Great Zhou. There were some people who loudly denounced Chen Changsheng, and there were naturally even more people that loudly came to his defense. In a few moments, this great street of the capital had erupted into a massive argument, noisy and raucous beyond compare.

Chen Changsheng looked at the window curtain, listening to those noises from the outside in deep astonishment. On the road, he had finally learned through Hua Jiefu the particulars of what had happened outside the Garden of Zhou. The first thing he had originally planned to do upon reaching the capital was confronting

Zhuang Huanyu, but who would have imagined that last night, Zhuang Huanyu...actually died?

The noise outside the carriage window was getting louder and louder, the disputes of the crowd growing increasingly intense, their words getting sharper. It was such a clamor that it made one feel troubled. Chen Changsheng wanted to say something, but he ultimately decided to say nothing. He lowered his head in silence, his eyelashes faintly trembling. The childish air about his appearance had finally almost completely dissipated.

Whether it was to ten thousand cheers or ten thousand pointed fingers, Chen Changsheng, under the gaze of countless commoners, returned to the capital. Only when the fleet of carriages pulled into Hundred Flowers Lane did the world outside of the window become relatively peaceful.

With the priests of the Li Palace guarding the perimeter around Hundred Flowers Lane, no one could approach. As Chen Changsheng gazed at the still-very-new gate of the Orthodox Academy and those still-very-old ivy vines, he felt the dignity and silence from his surroundings and found it rather uncomfortable.

It had taken one day to view all the monoliths of the front mausoleum, and one night to bathe the capital in starlight, after which the Pope had established him as the successor to the Orthodoxy. Not much time had passed since that day. In addition, after he left the Mausoleum of Books, he entered the Garden of Zhou, and in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, time had seemed to drag on. After that, there were the ten thousand li of snowy plains, the rushed escape. There had simply been no time and no

opportunity for him to absorb all these changes. Now, he couldn't help but feel that those were all things from another life.

Many things had changed. The Orthodox Academy that had once been surrounded by countless angry commoners of the capital had now become a place that no ordinary person could approach. Although it was still far from regaining the magnificence of its past, the atmosphere had been refreshed anew.

Thankfully, there were many things that had not changed. Jin Yulu still stood by the gate to the Orthodox Academy, and those silk clothes of his studded with copper coin designs, giving off a wealthy but unsophisticated feel, were still as glossy as water. Xuanyuan Po was still mighty and powerful, his arms as thick as trees. Being embraced by him still gave Chen Changsheng the illusion that he was being swallowed up.

Luoluo was still Luoluo, running into his bosom like a cool breeze. Her two arms wrapped around his neck while her forehead rubbed against his chin. Her petite face carried a contented smile.

Standing under the great banyan tree by the lake, Chen Changsheng and Luoluo spoke together for a very long time. Without missing out on anything, he told the little girl of everything that had occurred in the Garden of Zhou as well as everything he had encountered on the journey south.

"That elf girl...was she very beautiful?"

There were so many things—magnificent and grandiose scenes,

schemes and assassinations, one sword being delivered ten thousand li, ten thousand swords unsheathing themselves, a metal blade breaking through a storm—but Luoluo only cared about this. With her eyes wide, she asked Chen Changsheng inquisitively.

Chen Changsheng would naturally not forget that girl called Chen Chujian, but somehow, he could not quite remember her appearance. For some reason, his body went cold, as if he was at this very moment losing something.

Luoluo could tell that his mood had changed. Somewhat sympathetic, she reached out, grabbed his sleeve, and softly said, "Teacher, don't worry. I will think of a way to send people to check."

From Xunyang City to the capital was quite the long journey requiring plenty of time. Besides organizing his memories and preparing for what he needed to do in the capital, Chen Changsheng had obviously not forgotten to have the people of the Orthodoxy help him check for any traces of that girl Chujian. Yet neither the priests of the Li Palace nor the people in Hanqiu City could confirm whether this girl really was amongst the Ethereal Opening cultivators that had entered the Garden of Zhou. So it was naturally impossible to confirm whether she was alive or not.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat soothed by Luoluo's words. The Elf race was extremely close with the White Emperor City and the Great Western Continent. Luoluo's mother was the Chief Princess of the Great Western Continent and her father was the White Emperor of the demi-humans. For her to have people investigate should be more convenient.

Luoluo once again spoke, "Zhuang Huanyu died."

She had long forgotten that back when she was at the Heavenly Dao Academy seeking lessons, she had once seen this genius schoolmate of hers at Principal Mao's residence. She brought this matter up now because she was concerned that Zhuang Huanyu's death would bring her teacher trouble.

Chen Changsheng didn't speak for a few moments, then said, "Yeah, I know."

Luoluo spoke again, "Teacher, I went to the Imperial Palace twice, wanting to get Zhexiu released, but I didn't succeed."

Chen Changsheng rubbed her head and chuckled, "Your fault [lah](#)?"

(This 'lah' is here to evoke Luoluo's name as the ending interjection of a sentence.)

Being rubbed by his palm and looking so strong and lovely, Luoluo looked extremely cute.

The sunlight fell upon the spring lake and then reflected onto the branches of the great banyan tree, turning into ever-changing dimples of light. One of them fell on Chen Changsheng's face. Luoluo stared at that spot of light on his face and began to chuckle. She was very happy, because her teacher did not blame her, nor did he thank her, but instead especially taught her how to talk in

order to tease her and make her happy.

Afterwards, Chen Changsheng took one hour and three large basins of hot water to wash himself sparkling clean from head to toe. Then he and Luoluo headed together to the Li Palace.

The Pope was waiting for him in the Li Palace—

Not in the Great Hall of Light, but rather that quiet side hall.

The light in the hall was very faint. Only the tender green of the Green Leaf in the pot directly leapt into his eyes. After that, he saw that Divine Staff casually leaning against the wall, saw that clear pond and that ornate and grandiose crystal throne, as well as that Yin Yang Crown upon it that was impossible to describe with words. Finally, he saw that elder dressed in hempen robes. He was different from what his zealous worshippers imagined. The supreme Pope seemed just like an ordinary old man, not even as eye-catching as the Divine Staff and the Divine Crown.

Watching the Pope's back as he watered the Green Leaf, Chen Changsheng's emotions were somewhat disorderly. Everyone knew that he was the Pope's chosen successor, and some powerful figures even knew he was the Pope's martial nephew. In other words, he had always been the Pope's only successor in this world. But the problem lay in the fact that he had only met the Pope twice. He wasn't acquainted at all with the Pope, much less close.

The Pope took out a handkerchief and wiped his hands, then turned and smiled. "I remember that Su Li is a lover of fine foods.

Being with him, did you eat anything good?"

The Pope plainly had an amiable expression and his voice was so gentle. He was just like an elder questioning a junior that had returned from afar, and because he didn't want the junior to be too nervous, began with a very trivial question...but Chen Changsheng felt like a massive mountain spanning heaven and earth was directly crashing down on him.

From the snowy plains of the land of demons to Xunyang City, many people wanted to kill Su Li. Behind those people stood a lofty figure akin to a god.

It was precisely the Pope.

But Su Li had lived, and to a very large extent, it was because of Chen Changsheng. Thus, it was impossible for him to not think that the Pope's words concealed some sort of accusation and it was impossible for him to not be nervous.

Chapter 427 - The Plum Blossoms Bloom In Every Season, But The Fruit Of Autumn Descends

(There's a wordplay here with 'plum blossom' (梅) and 'beautiful' (美), which share pronunciation. The more commonly used line is 四季皆美, 'the four seasons are all beautiful', but here it is 四季皆梅.)

In the eyes of the common people, the Pope's trust and love towards Chen Changsheng could not be any greater, and was even somewhat unfathomable. Logically, it was only natural that Chen Changsheng act according to the Pope's will, but in reality, from the military fort to Xunyang City, Chen Changsheng had done many things that had gone against it. No matter what angle it was looked at from, the Pope should be very disappointed or at least ask for some reason.

The Pope did not ask. He only calmly gazed at Chen Changsheng and said, "It's really difficult to imagine that my Senior Brother could actually raise a student like you."

Chen Changsheng was struck dumb. He suddenly realized that his impression of his master was very blurry. Just what sort of person was Master? In the Pope's view, just what sort of student should Master have raised? He didn't know the answer, but he was very certain that the Pope's words were correct, because he had never been raised by his master. It was Senior Brother Yu Ren that had raised him...

As he thought about Xining Village's old temple, the mist behind the mountain and those sounds in the mist, and also his senior

brother and the wildflowers, he became somewhat lost in thought.

The Pope looked at him calmly and then smiled. He thought to himself, at this time, anyone else would get nervous, but it seems that this little kid actually has the leisure to think about other things. Truly extraordinary.

"Sit," he said to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng gave an affirmative and then very obediently sat down on the chair. He didn't lean against the back of it, nor did he deliberately attempt to adjust his seat. In brief, he acted very obediently and did nothing intentionally.

The Pope pointed at a teapot.

Chen Changsheng understood. Raising the teapot, he filled the cup in front of the Pope. After thinking about it, he also filled the cup that was in front of him, and then his mind began to wander off once more.

It was because he remembered those two nights in the Hundred Herb Garden, that small table, and sitting across from that woman as they drank tea in silence.

The Pope placed the cup down and randomly said, "Talk about the Garden of Zhou."

It was said randomly, and what he wanted to hear was also any

random thing that had happened in the Garden of Zhou, because there was only one matter that was certain: there was no Su Li in the Garden of Zhou.

"In the Garden of Zhou...I met a girl," Chen Changsheng inadvertently said.

The Pope was a little surprised. "Oh?"

At this, Chen Changsheng awoke from his stupor and felt his face heat up. He hurriedly elaborated in great detail on what had happened in the Garden of Zhou, from the time he had obtained the Yellow Paper Umbrella from the Tang clan in Wenshui up to the Mausoleum of Zhou. It was just that there were some details unrelated to the general picture, such as that girl, that he naturally did not mention. In addition, for some inexplicable reason, he did not mention the Halving Blade technique in the Mausoleum of Zhou, nor those lost Heavenly Tome Monoliths...

Light seeped in through the eaves of the hall, resting on the floor as glossy as jade. It created numerous patterns on the floor, forming what seemed like a chessboard.

The Pope sat in his chair, gazing silently at him for what seemed like forever.

The Mausoleum of Zhou, the Heaven Shrouding Sword, the Yellow Paper Umbrella, Mount Li, the Sword Pool, the monster tide, the story from several hundred years ago, the destiny linking the two worlds—after he had finished hearing about these things,

even he could not help but sigh with regret.

"As it turned out...the Sword Pool was a Sword Sea and was really the Plains of the Unsetting Sun. That person's grave was also within."

The Pope's voice resonated through the peaceful hall.

As one of the supreme Saints of the human world, his understanding of the world far surpassed the imaginations of the common people, but even for him, it was only today that he realized that the plains that he had seen so many years ago actually contained so many secrets.

"The obsidian coffin in the Mausoleum of Zhou was empty." Chen Changsheng would naturally not forget this most important detail.

The Pope smiled, but said nothing. That person's fate was an enigma for many people, but time was ultimately the world's strongest object. At this time, he no longer paid too much attention to it.

Comparatively speaking, the Pope cared more about another matter. "This being the case, those swords are all with you?"

Without any reluctance, Chen Changsheng took the dagger from his waist and used both hands to offer it to the Pope.

Back then in the Plum Garden Inn, when Tang Thirty-Six wanted

to hold this dagger, he had been rejected, but now Chen Changsheng could not reject. This was because the Pope was the Pope and also his martial uncle.

The swords of the Sword Pool were in his hands—this was a matter impossible to conceal. Back then in the wilderness when he was battling Divine General Xue He, those swords had already revealed themselves.

"Do you know what this sheath is?" The Pope did not take the dagger, instead gazing at him and asking this question.

Chen Changsheng shook his head.

The Pope was somewhat sorrowful as he explained, "This was once the most precious treasure of the entire Orthodox Academy. Later on, it vanished amidst that scene of fire and blood. It seems now like your master took it away."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say.

"I and Senior Brother were schoolmates and even fellow disciples. As a matter of fact, in terms of talent in cultivating the Dao or intelligence, he has always been above. Yet in the end, I inherited the position of Pope while he went to become the Principal of the Orthodox Academy."

The Pope lifted his eyes up to the sky outside the hall, the stars in the ocean of his eyes slowly winking in and out of existence, like

the passing of clouds or time. "Because his obsession was too great. You should not learn from him."

Chen Changsheng still did not know what to say. Concerning the Orthodox Academy's past, even today, he still did not have a clear picture of what had really happened. Even if he knew, he didn't have the qualifications to talk about it.

"What do we do about the swords from the Sword Pool?"

"The Li Palace will send out a notice informing the world. Those sects that still have descendants can first register, and then we will return their swords. As for those sects whose succession has already come to an end, those swords are yours to hold."

Chen Changsheng understood. In carrying out this matter in this fashion, after that night of bathing the Mausoleum of Books in the radiance of the stars, he would once again have achieved a great merit for the human world. The criticisms brought by Liang Xiaoxiao and Zhuang Huanyu's death would, for the most part, be mollified. He said, "I leave it up to Sir to take care of it."

He did not deferentially say 'His Holiness' and he did not pull on his sleeve and say 'Martial Uncle'. He only softly said the word 'Sir'. This was already a sort of progress, the sort of progress where he had finally returned to the naturally intimate world of his master's home.

The Pope was very satisfied and said to him, "Go, and rest up well."

Seeing his expression, the Pope understood what he was concerned about. He added, "Zhexiu will quickly come out."

From start to finish, the Pope had not asked him anything about Su Li.

Having just returned to the capital, how could he possibly rest up well? Exiting the Li Palace, he had no time to return to the Orthodox Academy or inquire after Zhexiu. Priest Xin came and took him over to the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

The row of maple trees there should have been as red as fire, but in the deep spring and beginning of summer, they were a verdant green that surpassed the color of jade—just like how that building behind them had the two important identities of being the Imperial Court's institution for managing education as well as the hall of the Orthodoxy responsible for learning.

Deep within the hall in that room filled with all sorts of plum flowers, Mei Lisha sat behind the table. His eyes were closed, seemingly asleep but not. The old spots on his face were clear to see, just like that rouge plum blossom on the table. Chen Changsheng stood in front of the table, separated by that rouge plum blossom from the archbishop, his emotions somewhat complex.

Unlike the Pope, there was no relationship between him and Archbishop Mei Lisha. Logically, it would be more appropriate for them to be strangers, but he always thought that the archbishop

really was extremely kind to him for some reason. Whether during the Grand Examination or the journey to the Garden of Zhou, Archbishop Mei Lisha had always offered aid or convenience. Although there were times when those matters placed a rather large pressure on him, it was not these things that made his emotions complicated. Instead, it was the fact that the archbishop was getting older.

Chen Changsheng didn't know what level of cultivation Mei Lisha had reached, but given that his seniority and level of influence in the Orthodoxy could be said to be on par with that of the Pope, and then considering the attitude Zhu Luo and those other people had for him, he was probably not very far from the Divine Domain. Priests at this level of cultivation were not different from other cultivators. To live eight hundred years was a very common occurrence, and in those long and endless years, even as these experts with profound cultivations aged, they would only show it in their hair and a few wrinkles on their face. They would absolutely not grow weak and elderly. Only in the final stage of life would they begin to consider the question of descendants and continue their bloodline. Then, with an almost unimaginable speed, they would become old.

Would they die like the quiet beauty of the autumn leaf? No, it was more like the descent of a fruit knocked down by the wind.

In this year, the entire continent knew that Archbishop Mei Lisha had become old.

This signified that the archbishop did not have many days left on this world. At any moment, he could return to the sea of stars.

The rouge plum blossom's gaudiness, and the plum blossoms blooming throughout the room made it seem like it wasn't late spring, but rather any of the four seasons of the year, any time of the year in which the plum blossoms could bloom.

In comparison to the flowers filling the room, the archbishop's elderliness was all the more shocking to see.

Chen Changsheng felt somewhat sorrowful.

At this time, the archbishop opened his eyes and smiled at him. "Come here."

Chen Changsheng complied and approached him.

Mei Lisha looked at him and said emotionally, "When I heard that you were still alive, I was very happy, and at the same time, somewhat sad."

Chen Changsheng didn't understand the meaning of his words, but for some reason, his heart was abruptly filled with unease and even fear.

"Since Su Li did not die, I still must withdraw my gaze and have it fall upon the capital once more, just like you must return to the capital in the end."

Mei Lisha continued, "The Boiling Stone Summit will happen next year. I do not know if I will be able to see it, but at the very least, I will be able to see this year of yours to the end."

Chen Changsheng wanted to say some comforting words, but then he realized that he wasn't so good in that aspect. He lowered in his head in self-reproach.

Mei Lisha calmly watched him and said, "This year is very important for you."

Chen Changsheng said, "I don't understand."

"You must mature as quickly as possible."

As he said these words, his expression became somewhat heavy and his eyes somewhat dimmed. However, he soon after brightened up just as before. "Believe in me. Ultimately, you and us, we will obtain victory."

Chen Changsheng really couldn't comprehend. He thought to himself, who am I battling with? Is it the Divine Empress? Even if it is, what sort of strength do I have to partake in a battle at that level?

"The problem between the Orthodoxy and the Empress is still about that seat in the Imperial Palace."

Mei Lisha somewhat laboriously stood up and walked Chen

Changsheng over to the window. Looking at the Imperial Palace not too far away, he said, "In this battle, you will play an extremely important role."

Chen Changsheng said, "Is it because...I am Teacher's student? Representing the support for the Imperial clan?"

Mei Lisha sighed with regret. "Of course it's not just this."

The archbishop did not give a more elaborate explanation. It was because this matter was too difficult to explain, even impossible, and also because someone just so happened to knock upon the door!

After the door was pushed open, the person that appeared was a person that Chen Changsheng had not expected to see.

Chapter 428 - [Granting Shining Light](#)

The person who had come was Prince Chen Liu, the Chen clan's sole representative in the capital, and also the only member of its junior generation that the Divine Empress would accept.

In the capital, Prince Chen Liu possessed an extremely good reputation, believed to be as warm and gentle as jade and yet also possessing an abundance of courage. Back then, this young prince, in spite of the discussion and rumors, had twice assisted Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy. Chen Changsheng had a very good impression of him, but for some reason, Tang Thirty-Six did not like him at all.

Prince Chen Liu gave a junior's bow to the archbishop, looked at Chen Changsheng, and smiled. "Don't you think that we've met a little too early?"

Mei Lisha ignored the hidden meaning in those words and went straight to the point. "The Orthodoxy wishes to invite the Empress to express her stance as soon as possible. The Tianhai clan will naturally disagree. Tianhai Shengxue is a smart man, but the people of his clan do not necessarily possess his intelligence. Even if they did, they would also be broken apart by the title of Emperor that seems so close at hand. After all, not all people can resist that sort of enticement."

Prince Chen Liu unflinchingly declared, "As the Chen Imperial clan, I and all my brothers in the counties will conduct ourselves in a just and straightforward manner."

Both of these statements had been said to Chen Changsheng.

"The Orthodoxy will always stand behind the Imperial clan. From the year in which Taizu founded the dynasty, this has always been so," Mei Lisha said firmly. "It is also the case now. It is just that because of Zhuang Huanyu's death, there will be some problems on the Heavenly Dao Academy's side. Among the six archbishops, there are still two that have not turned around, because His Holiness turned his views around too quickly."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, if it's this way, then what was going on with that bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy? Why would His Holiness support the Divine Empress for so many years? He understood that this was all to give him a breakdown of the current situation, but he was still uncomprehending. Just what could he do? Why had the archbishop arranged for him to meet with Prince Chen Liu?

Mei Lisha's next sentence provided an answer to this riddle, but provided a new riddle in its place, for both Chen Changsheng and for Prince Chen Liu.

"In the future, I ask that the Prince must remember the price that Chen Changsheng paid."

Prince Chen Liu had a thoughtful look on his face at these words, but nothing came of it.

Chen Changsheng also could not make anything of this, and his thoughts lay elsewhere. He asked, "What about Zhexiu?"

The Pope had said that Zhexiu would quickly come out, but he was still very anxious—Zhexiu was still in prison, and even worse, it was the Zhou Prison!

It was impossible for him to imagine what sort of dreadful torments that wolf youth had to bear in this period.

Mei Lisha said, "If the Imperial Court still does not release him, I will personally make a visit."

Prince Chen Liu said apologetically, "The second day after Zhexiu was imprisoned, I sent over my card...but you should also know that for a prince like me in front of Lord Zhou Tong, to say something is not very useful."

Standing under that row of maple trees still brimming with the air of spring, Chen Changsheng gazed in the direction rumored to be where Zhou Prison lay, then he turned in the direction of the Mausoleum of Books, then, finally, he turned towards the Imperial Palace and the Li Palace and sighed.

He was no ordinary youth, but in the end, he was still a youth. In this world, there were some matters that were too complex, too weighty, and somewhat difficult to bear. It even made it rather difficult for him to breathe. Compared to the capital, he felt that the storm in Xunyang City was more relaxed and straightforward. He would rather stand together with that metal blade and simply go off to do some things, even if those things to be done weren't all that simple.

Under the humble gazes of the priests, he left the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, but he didn't return to the Orthodox Academy. Instead, he went to the market to buy some tasty foods and then went to New North Bridge. Borrowing the glimmer of the sun setting in the west, he used his movement technique to become an illusion and jumped into the dried-up well.

The underground space was still chilling to the bone, but the Black Dragon was still asleep. The mountain range that was its massive body quietly rose up and down, and those iron chains were still rusted and inflexibly attached to the stone wall.

Chen Changsheng took out the food he had bought and, using lotus leaves to carry them, arranged them in front of the Black Dragon's body. Finally, he untied the ruyi from his waist and placed it on the ground.

The Black Dragon's spiritual soul was still sleeping in the ruyi and he didn't know when it would wake up.

After doing all this, he thought for a few moments, then wrote a few words in the frost on the ground. Then, he left.

He appeared in the pool, thoroughly soaked. After changing to a dry set of clothes he had prepared beforehand, he once more met the Black Goat in the courtyard of the Imperial Palace. He broke into a smile and crouched down to warmly embrace it, completely disregarding the slightly raised head of the Black Goat and its unwilling appearance.

There was a gust of wind, still chilly, but quickly dispersed several dozen zhang away. The lotus leaves on the frost once again became tender green and the fresh food once again began to emit warm heat.

Her hands held behind her back, the Tianhai Divine Empress had her head lowered as she read the words Chen Changsheng had just left behind in the frost. The corners of her lips revealed a mocking smile.

Without even a glance, her spiritual sense moved and that jade ruyi once again appeared on her waist.

At this moment, the strand of the Black Dragon's spiritual soul awakened and transformed into a chilly intent. By means of the red birthmark between the eyebrows, it returned to the dragon body. The dragon's pupils slowly opened and the ice streamed down. The mountain range of its body shrank at an unimaginable speed, ultimately transforming into a small black-clothed girl. However, the coldness of her appearance had already been greatly diminished by that cinnabar birthmark.

"Did you see, men are all fickle and lacking in affection," the Tianhai Divine Empress said teasingly to her.

The black-clothed girl saw the words he had left behind, then after a period of silence, said, "He didn't know when I would wake up and had things to do, so it's only natural that he leaves first. Moreover, he also doesn't know that I'm a girl..."

"You are a female dragon." The Tianhai Divine Empress calmly said, "If you were to let him know of this fact, what meaning would there be?"

The black-clothed girl was very angry, the baleful air about her increasing even more and the temperature of the underground space plummeting like a stone.

The Tianhai Divine Empress did not care. The circle several dozen zhang in radius around her was still as warm as the spring, and the ground by her feet even seemed to be showing little starry points of green.

The world above the well was early summer at dusk, and there was a bit of summer heat in the air. The ice shop far in the distance was doing good business, but this place by the well was very cold. This was because many imperial bodyguards were walking around, and also because of those terrifying Snow Mastiffs resting on the grass under the tree. Mo Yu held the leash in her hands as she quietly waited.

When the figure of the Divine Empress appeared once more, she quickly went over and said, "Prince Chen Liu also just went to the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education."

The Divine Empress glanced at her and asked, "What do you want to say?"

Mo Yu said, "I can't understand, even if Chen Changsheng is

Daoist Ji's student, is he really worth the Orthodoxy paying him so much attention? This...could it be some sort of camouflage technique?"

This sort of incomprehension was a question that the ministers and wise advisors had required her to ask as soon as possible, but perhaps not even she could perceive that this actually made the Empress lower her guard against Chen Changsheng a little more.

The Divine Empress said, "The actions of the people in the Orthodoxy are best when they are deliberately mystifying. There is no need to understand them."

This said, she began walking towards the Imperial City. Those two Snow Mastiffs noiselessly left the tree and followed behind her.

Watching the Empress's back, Mo Yu gave a slightly sarcastic smile. She thought to herself, if there really is no need to understand, why is it that when Chen Changsheng came to see the Black Dragon, Empress followed him?

Her inability to understand was because she did not know of the pact between the Divine Empress and the Black Dragon, nor of the existence of the jade ruyi.

Returning to the Imperial Palace, she gazed at the pool in front of her. As she thought about how Chen Changsheng had most likely emerged from this pool just a while ago, she also began to think of a much earlier time, about that first night in which Chen

Changsheng first emerged from this pool—that youth did not care that he was deep in the palace on dangerous ground. When he saw a woman about to be struck by a flower pot knocked over by a panicked squirrel, he had rushed over.

The Divine Empress once more revealed a mocking smile, but it always seemed to give off the feeling of an elder teasing a junior.

With the slightest stimulation of her spiritual sense, the jade ruyi left her belt of its own accord and floated above the pool. The water of the pool fell into turmoil, as if it was boiling, and the pool began to give out clouds of mist.

A light shot out of the jade ruyi and projected onto the mist, and a picture gradually began to grow distinct—these were the scenes that the Black Dragon saw after leaving the capital with Chen Changsheng. Later on, there were many times when her soul had been asleep in the ruyi, but the ruyi, tied to Chen Changsheng's waist or on his wrist, had still recorded those scenes down.

Seeing these scenes, the Divine Empress grew quieter and quieter. The smile did not disappear, but it was no longer very mocking, leaving behind only a sort of interest.

The scenes quickly sped by, gradually transforming into streaks of light. It was many times faster than normal speed, and only a Saint like her would be able to make out the scenes clearly.

When the golden wings illuminated the night and the image of the heavily injured white-clothed girl appeared, the Divine

Empress's brows leapt up, for the first time expressing a deep concern.

Xu Yourong was her most dearly beloved junior. Although she was disguised, it was impossible to conceal it from her eyes.

In the next scenes, Xu Yourong met Chen Changsheng, but neither of them knew who the other was. The Divine Empress silently smiled, most likely thinking this very amusing.

Eventually, she saw that unsetting sun at the edge of the plains, saw the surging tide of monsters, saw Xu Yourong not leaving, Chen Changsheng not abandoning, and saw that person's mausoleum.

The smile on her face gradually faded. She calmly gazed at the Mausoleum of Zhou in silence.

Eventually, the light dimmed and then everything vanished without a trace.

With a light wave of her hand, the scene went back to the place where Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng first met, and also the first place where their misunderstanding began.

That place was an isle of reeds at the edge of a lake, the two people having come across each other but not knowing who the other was.

The ruyi could not record the inner workings of Xu Yourong's mind, but the Divine Empress clearly knew what she was thinking about, why she had never connected that unconscious youth with Chen Changsheng who she had an engagement with—no matter who it was, nobody thought Chen Changsheng looked like a fifteen-year-old youth. He was too unflustered and calm, even when he was unconscious. Back then, when Xu Yourong had looked over, she had thought this person was around twenty years old. Then, just how could this person be Chen Changsheng?

The Divine Empress stood in front of the pool for a very long time, and what she thought about was unknown.

Suddenly, she looked at Xu Yourong in the scene and said, "So, even you felt he wasn't fifteen years old."

The night wind breezed through the grass. At some point, a chief eunuch had arrived outside the palace hall.

She asked, "What?"

The chief eunuch reported in a low voice, "There are still no new clues in the case. Lord Zhou Tong also did not discover anything in Xining Village...only that crazy Lord Hu on the Imperial Board of Astronomy still continues to insist...that Crown Prince Zhaoming is still alive."

He had been with the Divine Empress for several hundred years and had experienced countless great matters, but when he mentioned what that insane Lord Hu had said, his voice still could

not help but tremble.

The Divine Empress gazed up at the night sky at a certain place where a star should have existed. For what seemed like ages, she said nothing.

(The chapter title, 'Granting Shining Light', is a line from one of the poems of the 'Classic of Poetry', 诗经. The poem in question wishes blessings and shining light 昭明 to the king, as well as wishing that he is blessed with sons and daughters and a long life. If you have the translation of the Classic of Poetry/Book of Songs by Arthur Waley, the poem is number 202. In this case, the 'shining light' also refers to the name of Crown Prince Zhaoming 昭明, so it can also mean 'Granting you a son, Zhaoming'.)

Chapter 429 - Darkness

The crown prince was the natural successor to the position of emperor. If the Great Zhou had a crown prince, there would simply have been no need for the conflict between the Orthodoxy and the Divine Empress to evolve to its current degree and the state of the continent would be much more stable—in fact, the Great Zhou really did have a crown prince once. He was the son of Emperor Xian and the Divine Empress, and he was precisely Crown Prince Zhaoming.

Lamentably, the successive crown princes of the Great Zhou never met a good end. After Emperor Taizu founded the country, his crown prince died a tragic death in the rebellion in the Hundred Herb Garden. The crown prince that had been meticulously raised and educated by Emperor Taizong was also ultimately involved in some indescribable conspiracy and killed. This Crown Prince Zhaoming also met a rather unfortunate end, but one could also say that it was relatively fortunate, because he died when he was very small, rather than being cut down in a similar tragedy.

Not long after Emperor Xian died, Crown Prince Zhaoming died of illness in his infancy.

But no one believed it. Of course no one believed it. How could the union of the blood of the Imperial clan and the Divine Empress produce a son that died so young?

With regards to the reason for the death of Crown Prince Zhaoming, there were countless theories.

There was one theory that was the most broadly spread—back then when the Chen Imperial clan joined hands with the conservative faction of the Orthodoxy to drive the Divine Empress from the emperor's seat, in that soul-shaking battle where the Divine Empress and the Pope obtained the final victory, several hundred princes and nobles of the Chen Imperial clan were either killed or banished. In addition, the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy were killed or wounded until there was almost no one left, leaving only the frosted grass and the broken wells and collapsed walls. However, the Divine Empress had also paid an enormous price—in that rebellion, Crown Prince Zhaoming was poisoned to death by the Divine Empress's enemies.

There was also another theory that spread far and wide, but it was impossible to hear it in the teahouses and the inns. Only in the dark night was it uneasily circulated. That theory was even more cruel, even more callous.

There were some people who surreptitiously insisted that several hundred years ago when the Divine Empress was expelled from the Imperial Palace by Emperor Taizong and lived out her miserable days in the Hundred Herb Garden, she had gotten to know the Pope and the then-Principal of the Orthodox Academy. From them, she learned the secret to defying the heavens and changing fate. She swore an oath to the starry sky that it would be better in this life if her bloodline was to be ended, and from this defied the heavens and changed fate. Crown Prince Zhaoming's death was the curse from her defiance of the heavens and the changing of her fate, or perhaps it could be said to be the wrath of heaven...it was also possible that it was an action she had done herself to complete the process of changing her fate!

In those dark rumors, those people narrating seemed to have personally witnessed that dreadful and bloody scene in the Imperial Palace, describing everything in vivid detail—how the Divine Empress's hand had passed through the swaddling clothes, reaching for that wailing infant. Her beautiful and dignified face showed no expression, but a single tear flowed down from the corner of her eye, and then the crying sounds gradually grew quiet. In the darkness, the palace was so peaceful it could cause the heart to beat in fear.

If this was the wrath of heaven invited by the Divine Empress going against the heavens and changing her fate, leading her to be without descendants and to live alone on this world until her death, then the Heavenly Dao and the sea of stars were truly too unfeeling and terrifying. If the Divine Empress had personally killed off her only son so that she could complete the process of changing her fate just so that she could live on this continent isolated and without anyone else, then she was truly too unfeeling and frightening.

No matter the theory, Crown Prince Zhaoming was already dead, dead for a callous and terrifying reason, dead in a very unfortunate and pitiable manner. Afterwards, there was no one who dared to bring up this topic, including the Chen Imperial clan and the Orthodoxy. Only that crazy Lord Hu of the Imperial Board of Astronomy, even after Zhou Tong had plucked out all of his fingernails, continued to declare to the world with his blood-filled mouth that Crown Prince Zhaoming...was not dead. And then, right as Zhou Tong was prepared to rip out Lord Hu's tongue as well, the Divine Empress bestowed her mercy and allowed Lord Hu to return to his home to recuperate.

In the view of many, this was not mercy, it was a guilty conscience, or perhaps a sort of self-consolation. Just what went on in the Imperial Palace in that year? Just how did Crown Prince Zhaoming die? Why would the Empress have a guilty conscience? Thus, that cruel and horrifying theory spread more and more. Of course, it still only did so in the dark night.

At night, the Imperial Palace was very peaceful, but this night at the beginning of summer was actually endlessly cold.

The chief eunuch lowered his head, not even daring to glance at the Divine Empress.

The quiet courtyard, in a flash, transformed into a frigid snowy plain. There was no sign of any snowflakes, but the surface of the pool was gradually forming a layer of ice.

With a single thought, a Saint could move heaven and earth. If they were in a rage, the waves would rage and the sea would be in turmoil. If their mood was dark, the curtain of the night would fall over the sky. If their emotions were both downcast and extremely melancholy, there would naturally be wind and snow for days on end.

Just as the chief eunuch felt like his sea of consciousness would freeze and snap, the Divine Empress's voice finally rang out once more. Her voice was very calm and very indifferent, just like the water of the pool under the sheet of ice. "All the world's people are my sons. The Prince of Xiang (相) and the Prince of Xiang (象) [are](#)

[also my sons](#). Zhaoming's death has never been important."

(The two Princes of Xiang have different Chinese characters for their names. The first one uses '相' while the second uses '象')

It had never been important, so it had also not been important in the past.

The chief eunuch lowered his head even more, as if it was almost about to touch the cold surface of the ground. He slowly began to retreat backwards into the darkness.

From outside the garden slowly ambled a black goat, its fur as glossy black as jade. It had walked out of the darkness as if it carried a piece of the darkness with it.

Was everything obscured by the darkness true? Then what about darkness itself?

The Divine Empress gazed expressionlessly at the goat and asked, "And what about you? Why are you willing to be so close to him? Just who is he?"

Tonight was Chen Changsheng's first night in the Orthodox Academy after his return. Just like all those previous nights, after eating dinner and strolling around the lake, he very naturally walked into the library. Luoluo had returned to the Li Palace and Tang Thirty-Six was still in the Mausoleum of Books. Xuanyuan Po was hitting trees and Zhexiu was still in Zhou Prison. He didn't know what else to do, so he decided to just continue cultivating.

The starlight passed through the colored glass and the snowflakes passed through the sparse leaves, not stopping at his clothes or skin but directly entering the depths of his body. The mantle of snow on the plains was growing ever thicker. Although the lake surrounding his spirit mountain was still far from transforming into a vast ocean, the force of the water was much greater now. The stone door of the Ethereal Palace at the end of the slanted stone steps in the spirit mountain was already fully open. A gentle light shot out of the dwelling and scattered all over the water, giving a very tranquil sensation.

In his current state, he would naturally not be as perplexed as before, believing that the starlight he had absorbed had all gone to some other place. He calmly perceived that star of his in the distant starry sky and perceived the changes in his body. Time slowly passed, and after some time, he opened his eyes, awakening from his trance and beginning to sort out his gains from this time.

When he had left the Mausoleum of Books, he was already at the upper level of Ethereal Opening. After encountering so many powerful enemies in the Garden of Zhou and on the journey back south, his sword heart had gradually completely harmonized and his cultivation had grown much more stable, even almost faintly about to climb to the peak of Ethereal Opening. Adding on how long he had followed Su Li for, his swordplay had advanced even more. With both of these, he could said to be unrivaled amongst all cultivators below the Star Condensation Realm. Even if he were to encounter cultivators at the initial level of Star Condensation, he would still have a chance of winning. This fact was rather comforting for him, but it did not allow him to relax at all, because he had never once forgotten that piece of darkness.

His time was truly not abundant. Even if he could be considered the fastest person to cultivate to the peak of Ethereal Opening, there was still a boundless distance to the Concealed Divinity Realm. Just how long would that take? So he absolutely had to value his time—after concluding his meditation, purification, and self-introspection, he immediately began to practice his swordplay.

The lake and snowy plain within his body indicated that he had already accumulated an enormous amount of true essence, far surpassing that of cultivators of the same age. The problem was that his meridians were still broken and it was impossible for him to completely utilize this true essence. The Blazing Sword taught to him by Su Li could only address one part of this. In addition, the price required by the Blazing Sword was too great. With his current level of cultivation, he could at most perform three strikes.

Moreover, the Blazing Sword was impossible to practice; it injured the body. The Intellectual Sword was also impossible to practice; it injured the mind. He could only practice the Stupid Sword. Standing on the floor, he pulled out his dagger and bared it horizontally in front of him, incessantly repeating this simple and dry routine. It truly did look rather stupid.

After doing it one thousand times, he once more sat cross-legged on the floor and sent his spiritual sense into his sheath.

The world within the sheath contained ten thousand damaged and broken swords. They peacefully floated in that space, not disturbing each other.

These swords no longer possessed the might they had when they first appeared in the Garden of Zhou. However, these were divine swords whose names once shook the world after all, and their sword intents were still powerful. The seemingly expansive space had long since been occupied by those sword intents.

His spiritual sense passing through the ten thousand sword intents was truthfully a very dangerous thing, especially because this time, he was not attempting to use his spiritual sense to control those ten thousand swords. Instead, he was having his spiritual sense come in direct contact with those ten thousand sword intents.

He was using the sword intents of the ten thousand swords to hone his sword heart.

He was currently already harmonized with his sword heart. If this was made known to others, it would inevitably incur stunned cries of admiration, because this was an incredibly difficult task to accomplish. The next step was to truly make the sword heart brightly lit. And yet to make the sword heart brightly lit required too high of a talent in the path of the sword. Surveying the entire continent, only a scant few possessed sword hearts that were truly brightly lit.

The problem was this: in the past few weeks, Chen Changsheng had met two people with brightly lit sword hearts—Su Li and the girl called Chujian—so it was naturally impossible for him to be content with this.

Those sword intents were a grindstone and his spiritual sense

was the edge of a sword. Sometimes sharp and sometimes tyrannical sword intent constantly touched, grinded, and cut away at his spiritual sense.

This was a very painful course of events. He closed his eyes and didn't exude a bead of sweat, but his face gradually grew paler.

The edges of a sword are only produced through incessant honing, and only by enduring the bitter winter can the plum blossoms give off a beautiful scent. Without experiencing a storm, one cannot see a rainbow.

He thought of these famous sayings of the people of the past while enduring an almost unimaginable suffering, until that spiritual sense that had entered the sheath grew increasingly thin and weak, like it could scatter at any moment...

Suddenly, he felt that hidden behind those ten thousand sword intents, something was attracting his spiritual sense.

As soon as he sensed that attractive force, the spiritual sense that was thin and weak and about to scatter abruptly stabilized and regained its former strength.

His spiritual sense moved past the ten thousand sword intents and slowly made its way over to the distant other side.

Eventually, the light boat finally passed the ten thousand heavy mountains and his spiritual sense finally arrived at the shore

beyond the ocean of sword intents.

The other shore of the ocean of sword intents turned out to be a real shore. On the shore was a black stone monolith. Not a real stone monolith, but an illusion.

That black monolith was somewhat familiar. It seemed just like a piece of darkness.

The instant he saw that black monolith, Chen Changsheng very naturally had a certain feeling. This illusion of a monolith should be a door to another place.

What world was on the other side of the black monolith? What lay behind the darkness? Suddenly, he remembered that the reason this black monolith seemed so familiar was not because it was the darkness that he saw every night, but because that black monolith looked exactly like Wang Zhice's black stone, which he had taken from the Lingyan Pavilion and was transformed back into a Heavenly Tome Monolith. It also looked exactly like the Heavenly Tome Monoliths that had been placed all around the Mausoleum of Zhou.

Could it be that this black monolith led to the Garden of Zhou? Could it be that the Garden of Zhou was not yet destroyed?

Chapter 430 - Morning Rain

Thinking of that plain within the Garden of Zhou, the Sunset Valley, those Daoist scriptures and old things he had lost in that lake, Chen Changsheng was excessively astonished and very pleasantly surprised.

Back then when he left the Garden of Zhou, he simply had no idea what had occurred. From another point of view, he simply had no idea how he had managed to leave the Garden of Zhou and suddenly appear tens of thousands of li away in the snowy plains of the demon realm. Because he didn't know of the metal plate in Black Robe's hands, he was completely lost with regards to everything that had happened shortly after he left the Garden of Zhou. It was only afterwards on the journey back that he heard Hua Jiefu's report.

If the Garden of Zhou was not destroyed, wasn't it possible that those Heavenly Tome Monoliths that Zhou Dufu had stolen away could possibly see the light of day once more?

Yes, the most important and most valuable object in the Garden of Zhou was not that mausoleum, nor was it those magical artifacts lost by those people of the past, and even less was it those roast chickens and lambs, those silver ingots and those books. Of course, it was those Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

No, Chen Changsheng stiffened as he thought of a possibility. He had suddenly realized that the most precious object in the Garden of Zhou was not necessarily those Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

At least for him.

If that girl Chujian...had not been able to escape the Garden of Zhou, then could she still possibly be in the Garden of Zhou? If the Garden of Zhou had not been destroyed, didn't that mean that she might still be alive? That she was inside right now?

He knew that this possibility was extraordinarily minute, but since he had thought of it, he didn't possess the slightest hesitation. His spiritual sense directly charged at the black monolith's illusion!

A massive explosion boomed through his sea of consciousness.

That strand of his spiritual sense abruptly scattered into countless trails of gray smoke and then vanished without a trace.

He woke up in the Orthodox Academy's library, his sea of consciousness shuddering and suffering an incomparably acute pain, so unbearable that he felt like vomiting.

Only after a long time had passed did the pain gradually fade.

Without delay, Chen Changsheng split off another strand of his spiritual sense and sent it into the sheath. He requested that the ten thousand swords give way and instantly appeared on the other end of the ocean of sword intent.

And yet, there was nothing there.

The ten thousand swords had complied with his command and opened a path. The sword intent had retreated, so there was naturally no ocean of sword intent.

Without an ocean, how could there be a shore on the other side?

Without a shore, there could naturally be no black monolith waiting on the shore for his arrival.

Chen Changsheng thought about it, then released his control over those swords. As a result, the harsh sword intent once again filled the space and the ocean appeared once more.

With extreme difficulty, his spiritual sense crossed the ocean of sword intent and arrived at the other shore. He saw the black monolith and descended.

Exactly according to expectations, his strand of spiritual sense exploded into nothingness and he once more woke up.

Chen Changsheng fell into a long silence, and then he stood up and walked out of the library.

Tonight, he had consumed too much of his spiritual sense. He could no longer endure another attempt.

Re-discovering the Garden of Zhou, finding all those Heavenly

Tome Monoliths...the fierce impulse brought about by that girl—to suppress all these things was very grueling.

Even if he were the world's most intelligent youth, able to best resist such enticements, he would still find enduring it incredibly painful.

There were some matters which Chen Changsheng had long since found completely unbearable. One of these was that it had already been many days since he had taken a bath—from the time he entered the Garden of Zhou to his journey back south, just where did he have time to take a bath? Consequently, the first thing he had done today upon returning to the Orthodox Academy, putting aside everything else, was to use three large basins of hot water and one hour to clean himself from head to toe, scrubbing down every part of himself with meticulous care. Unfortunately, even after he did all this, he still felt like he wasn't clean.

After returning to his small building, he washed himself two more times. After determining that there wasn't even the tiniest speck of filth on his body, he began to use the Dragoncry Dagger to cut his hair, shave, cut his fingernails round, and cut his toenails square. After all this, he changed into a clean set of clothes and finally felt a bit more comfortable. Walking over to his window, he once more gazed at Zhou Prison and the Mausoleum of Books. In his heart, he called out to Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six, then he got on his bed and began to sleep.

This hour was still one of deep darkness.

At five o'clock in the morning, he promptly woke up.

There was a faint scent in the room. It wasn't the smell of makeup nor of flowers, but it was a very soothing scent.

There was a fine black hair on the edge of his pillow.

Presumably, Mo Yu had come over.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat in a daze. He thought to himself, did I really sleep so deeply last night? Or is it that Mo Yu is much stronger than people imagined?

It must be known that he was already a cultivator at the peak of the Ethereal Opening Realm. Even if Mo Yu was in the Star Condensation Realm, that didn't explain how she was able to noiselessly appear by his side and sleep by him on his bed for an entire night without him sensing it.

Of course, he even more felt rather uncomfortable, that this was rather preposterous.

Mo Yu was the Great Zhou Dynasty's most famous beauty.

She was the Great Zhou Dynasty's second-highest woman.

And they were enemies.

He had just returned to the capital, but she didn't even give him

one night's worth of time before stealthily coming over to sleep in his bed. Just what was she doing?

A rain suddenly began to fall outside the window. It wasn't a very cold rain, but it still made the beginning of summer abruptly return to the spring season.

Chen Changsheng looked out the window and suddenly heard a big noise coming from the distant school gate.

Everything was rather familiar, just like that drizzling day when Tianhai Shengxue had brought the cavalry of the Great Zhou Northern Army to knock down the gate to the Orthodox Academy in the early morning.

Who had decided to come today in this morning rain?

It was still someone from the Tianhai clan. It wasn't Tianhai Shengxue, but it was also someone that Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po were acquainted with.

When Xuanyuan Po saw the youth sitting on the wheelchair, his emotions were somewhat complex. Back then, his right arm had been crippled by this youth. Logically, he should be very hostile to this youth, but later on, Luoluo had made this youth into a cripple and wounded him far more severely. Moreover, his right arm's injuries were all basically healed thanks to Chen Changsheng's treatment. This simple and honest bear youth really didn't have much hostility, but on the contrary felt some sympathy.

Sitting in the wheelchair was Tianhai Ya'er, that powerful youth who once possessed an extraordinarily terrifying and evil reputation in the capital. Of course, all that was now in the past.

Now, Tianhai Ya'er's face was pale and his cheeks slightly swollen. The muscles of his two legs had clearly atrophied somewhat. He was already crippled. Anybody who saw this youth, if they hadn't heard of his past vile deeds, would presumably be like Xuanyuan Po, filled with pity and sympathy.

But Tianhai Ya'er was a person that did not require sympathy. He had never sympathized with someone else, nor did he need someone else's sympathy. Whether it was to himself or to others, he was always very cruel—even as a cripple, he was unwilling to suffer in silence.

"Chen Changsheng, f*** your ancestors to the eighteenth generation!"

Chen Changsheng had just arrived at the gate to the Orthodox Academy and the first words he heard had to do with him. Although he still didn't even know who his father and mother were, let alone where his ancestral home was, when he heard Tianhai Ya'er's sharp voice, he couldn't help but get angry.

The gate to the Orthodox Academy was pushed open. Just like last year, Chen Changsheng walked through the morning rain into the Hundred Flowers Lane to confront his enemy.

Chapter 431 - It Will Only Be Overcast For Two Or Three Days

A year had already passed. The Orthodox Academy had not taken in any new students, but it had still been given new life. It was no longer that graveyard of the past. The inside of the academy was still cold and cheerless, but the outside had long since been placed under heavy guard. The priests of the Li Palace stood guard in Hundred Flowers Lane, not even leaving during the late night. It was simply impossible for any of the common folk to approach. However, when the priests saw that youth in the wheelchair, their eyes filled with vigilance and loathing, yet it was impossible for them to take action. The Tianhai clan possessed special status in the Great Zhou Dynasty. In addition, they did not act because Tianhai Ya'er was already a cripple.

Using the Divine Empress's words, it was best for the actions of the people of the Orthodoxy to be deliberately mystifying. Those people of the Orthodoxy were concerned with justification and being honorable. It was very difficult for them to make the first move against this crippled youth. Apart from all this, there was still one other reason. It was that beside Tianhai Ya'er, there was one more person. That person seemed about thirty years old and had a tall and slender body. His face was gloomy and cold and his body exuded an extremely powerful Qi.

In the drizzle, Tianhai Ya'er's sharp and resentful curses rang out without end, but that person kept his silence, not speaking a single word. He only calmly watched the tightly shut school gate, thinking about something or the other.

The new gate of the Orthodox Academy was pushed open from within. Chen Changsheng stood at the top of the stone steps. The first thing he noticed upon seeing Tianhai Ya'er was that he wasn't holding an umbrella, nor was the person standing by the wheelchair holding an umbrella for him. He looked at that person and guessed that he probably wasn't Tianhai Ya'er's bodyguard, but he didn't know about the person's background.

Chen Changsheng turned his gaze back to Tianhai Ya'er in his wheelchair and said, "You probably clearly understand just why the elders of your clan asked you to yell curses in front of the Orthodox Academy!"

Tianhai Ya'er's face had been drenched in the rain, making it seem even paler, but his expression was still fierce and arrogant. In addition, because Chen Changsheng had appeared, he became excited.

"Of course I know!" The youth's voice was getting increasingly sharp, even somewhat shrill, like he was crying and laughing at the same time. "I'm already a piece of trash. It's only natural that this piece of trash is used well! Are you looking for sympathy? Besides, the matter between us is only something between two children, just making trouble! Is His Holiness really going to say in good faith that my Tianhai clan is suppressing the Principal of the Orthodox Academy?"

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng replied, "But I don't understand, what meaning is there in you stirring up this trouble? I can just ignore you."

Today was not like in the past. The gate to the Orthodox Academy was presently being guarded by a bishop and several dozen priests of the Li Palace, preventing those two from the Tianhai clan from entering. Putting aside the wheelchair-bound Tianhai Ya'er, even if Tianhai Shengxue brought the cavalry from Snowhold Pass to come and fight, they would also find themselves incapable of simply bursting through the gate of the Orthodox Academy as they had done in the past.

Tianhai Ya'er began to laugh, revealing his fine white teeth, looking like some injured cub. His sharp voice once more rang out, "Didn't you just hear me curse your family to the eighteenth ancestor?"

Chen Changsheng once more fell into silence, then said, "And then? I have to curse your family to the eighteenth ancestor? I don't intend to do that."

The ancestors of the Tianhai clan were precisely the Divine Empress's ancestors.

He would not repeat his mistake from last year.

Tianhai Ya'er sneered and said, "I don't dare to curse Luoluo... Her Highness, but I'm not afraid of you. I'm very interested to see just how long you can endure this."

"Then continue cursing." Saying this, Chen Changsheng turned back into the Orthodox Academy and left.

As he was opening the door and listening to Tianhai Ya'er disgracing his parents and ancestors, he really was very angry. He was prepared to disregard any consequences that the Tianhai clan would have, what plots they had concocted. He just wanted to educate this kid for a spell, but when he walked out the door and saw the crippled youth in the wheelchair, he changed his mind.

Tianhai Ya'er was cruel and cold-blooded. He had once been a very terrifying person. Now that he was a cripple, he was still very frightening, but this fear came from the fact that he had no sense of honor, no reverence, no goals to pursue, and now he didn't even have any ambitions. The current was a pool of mud. If Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy did not want to stick their feet into this swamp and from then on be slowed by this swamp, then they could only ignore it, or else use sand and stone to directly fill up this swamp.

Since they couldn't just go and kill Tianhai Ya'er, to do anything else was meaningless. Consequently, there was no need to stand in front of the gate and listen to these words.

As he gazed at Chen Changsheng's back, Tianhai Ya'er froze. He grew even more furious and began to curse without end in his shrill voice, every sort of filthy obscenity and curse spewing out of his mouth in an unending stream.

Chen Changsheng acted like he couldn't even hear. His steps did not get any faster nor did they slow. With a steady pace, he walked back into the academy.

The priests were all incredibly astonished at this scene and were

also filled with admiration. They thought to themselves, he truly is worthy of being His Holiness's most cherished junior, worthy of being the youngest Principal of the Orthodox Academy in history.

The man standing next to the wheelchair raised his eyebrows slightly as he watched Chen Changsheng's back, like he was somewhat surprised. But soon after, the surprise transformed into disdain.

Compared to his peers, Chen Changsheng truly was rather mature and steady, or perhaps too excessively calm and quiet. He didn't seem at all like a sixteen-year-old youth.

Xuanyuan Po seemed even older, but in reality, he was only a fourteen-year-old bear youth. As a result, he couldn't understand how Chen Changsheng could stand it. He rather angrily asked, "That's it?"

Chen Changsheng glanced at him and replied, "What else is there to do? Kill him?"

Xuanyuan Po seemed to consider the idea and said, "It's not out of the question."

Chen Changsheng refuted, "He is a person of the Tianhai clan. Unless the Li Palace personally issues a decree, no one can do anything. In addition, there's always someone at his side, didn't you see?"

Xuanyuan Po asked, "Is that person very strong?"

Chen Changsheng said, "Star Condensation Realm."

Xuanyuan Po sucked in a breath of cold air. That tall and slender man that seemed only around thirty was actually an expert of the Star Condensation Realm?

"But, we can't just let Tianhai Ya'er keep cursing outside forever, right?"

"I have more important things to do."

Yes, Chen Changsheng had more important things to do.

Compared to those things, this strategy of the Tianhai clan of sending someone to say loathsome things and the malice concealed behind it was insignificant. In the past, the most important thing to him had naturally been cultivating. However, besides cultivating, there was now one other matter that was important to him. It was precisely finding out whether that black monolith he had found on the other side of the ocean of sword intent while he was honing his sword heart actually led to the Garden of Zhou. If it did, then he wanted to enter the Garden of Zhou and take a look.

His spiritual sense landed on the illusion of the black monolith and then was instantly jolted into countless strands by that terrifying energy contained within. This energy which the world could not possibly contain thus transformed his spiritual sense

into nothingness. A sudden gust blew through the library and Qi spurted out of his body, wafting up his sleeves as well as the little dust on the bookshelves.

He had made three successive attempts but all of them had ultimately ended in failure. His face was as pale as the sheet of paper on Xiao Zhang's face and he could no longer bear the shocks to his sea of consciousness and the backlash from that vigorous energy. Pushing open the door to the library, he rushed over to the edge of the lake and then, holding his stomach, began to vomit on the grass. It was quite a miserable scene.

Xuanyuan Po was at the moment striking trees. He was flabbergasted at this scene and walked over to support Chen Changsheng. Looking at the damp spot on the grass, he said worriedly, "Fortunately, you haven't eaten breakfast, or else this would look far too nasty."

Chen Changsheng had always paid attention to taking three meals every day. This morning, because he was impatient, he didn't eat breakfast. He still had to eat lunch and dinner, but he somehow felt like he didn't have much of an appetite.

There was some sort of revulsion in his stomach that was extremely unbearable. Everything he ate seemed to have no taste.

"This boiled cauliflower...did you forget to add salt?"

Xuanyuan Po felt very wronged. He thought to himself, in the entire Orthodox Academy, only I am making the food, and you still

act so picky! In addition, your complaints don't have any logic! He angrily shouted:

"You yourself said to use less oil and salt when cooking!"

Chen Changsheng held up his bowl with both hands and feebly said, "For dinner...cook some food with a bit more taste."

Xuanyuan Po looked at him and thought, I guess he's really sick, or else how could these words possibly come out of this guy's mouth? He asked, "Do you want me to invite Her Highness to check up on you?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. Luoluo was the princess of the demi-humans and her status was too sensitive. He hoped that she would not get involved in this confrontation between the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy.

On the second day, it did not rain in the morning. Thereby, the late spring once again returned to the beginning of summer. The weather in the capital in the fifth and sixth months of the year had always been this hard to pin down. Tianhai Ya'er was also a person that was very difficult to pin down. He had once been cold-blooded, murderous and cruel, wielding the power of the Tianhai clan and his own talent in cultivation to commit every sort of unspeakable crime. Later on, after he had been crippled by Luoluo, he had vanished for the greater part of a year. When he appeared once more before the people of the capital, he actually displayed a rarely-seen patience and perseverance, even though what he was doing seemed to have nothing to do with the two aforementioned traits.

The wheelchair rolled over the gray stone and arrived at the entrance of the Orthodox Academy. The crippled youth took a sip of tea to moisten his throat, then under the strange and attentive gazes of the priests, continued his cursing.

Yesterday, he had cursed for the entire day. It seemed that Orthodox Academy would still be shrouded in these filthy obscenities today as well.

However, there was a difference from yesterday. Today, a bustling crowd of spectators had also come.

The crowd could not walk any further into Hundred Flowers Lane, being barred by the priests and those soldiers that had come to maintain order. However, they could hear Tianhai Ya'er's insults loud and clear.

In truth, there was nothing fresh about Tianhai Ya'er's insults. They merely sent greetings to Chen Changsheng's elders, especially his female family members.

"Chen Changsheng, your mother."

"Chen Changsheng, I'll f*** your daughter to death."

Hearing these filthy words, the crowd outside the street fell into a murmur of discussion, some people shaking their heads in silence. Although none of them was pleased, no one dared to say

anything.

That tall and slender man still stood by the wheelchair, watching the tightly shut gate to the academy. Although what he was thinking was a mystery, the corners of his lips still revealed that faint smile of derision. It seemed to be mocking Chen Changsheng's timidity, but it also seemed to hold some other meaning.

"Do you really not care? Even if you don't tell Her Highness, you should still have the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education appear and take care of things."

Xuanyuan Po said this to Chen Changsheng, his face thoroughly red as he listened to Tianhai Ya'er's vile words coming from outside.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Back then when the Orthodox Academy's gate was knocked down by Tianhai Shengxue's men, who ultimately fixed it?"

Xuanyuan Po thought he understood what Chen Changsheng was getting at, so he asked, "Then what should we do next?"

"Wait a few more days." Chen Changsheng paused, then said, "...wait three more days."

After saying this, he glanced outside and saw that the light was a bit gloomy. He realized that today was overcast.

If he ignored it, the days would continue as usual. Time would not change its speed as it did in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun. One day's time passed in a very regular fashion.

Tianhai Ya'er blocked up the gate of the Orthodox Academy for two whole days with his cursing. The Li Palace and Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education maintained their silence and they sent out no messages.

However, a message did come from the Mausoleum of Books. In another three days, a person would come out.

Chapter 432 - No Man At The Ferry, The Mausoleum Opens On Its Own

Early in the morning on the third day, Tianhai Ya'er and that tall man promptly arrived in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate. Quite a few spectators from the capital had also already arrived.

In the previous two days, Chen Changsheng had severely exhausted his spiritual sense but had still failed to open that black monolith on the other side of the ocean of sword intent. Today, he was prepared to temporarily halt his endeavors for a day.

He sat in the library and began to read and study.

There was a sudden wind, then it began to rain. The sound of the wind, the sound of the rain, and the sound as he read through books mingled with the sound of cursing from the other side of the walls; as one sound fell, another rose, but none of them clashed with the others.

Chen Changsheng could shut out all disturbances from his mind, but other people could not. The common folk of the capital already had an extremely awful impression of the Tianhai clan, and they were completely lacking in favorable opinions of Tianhai Ya'er, who had obtained an evil reputation early on. By noon, when those spectators drenched in the rain realized that Tianhai Ya'er's obscenities were all the same old curses and had cycled around to the very beginning, someone finally booed, followed by a few mocking laughs.

Tianhai Ya'er sat in his wheelchair, his face getting increasingly pale and the expression in his eyes growing increasingly ruthless. He raised his right hand. As a result, a conflict erupted between the crowd and the Tianhai clan's followers. The priests of the Li Palace and the guards were a little late in rushing over. Two ordinary commoners were injured and one follower of the Tianhai clan had been beaten up by the crowd until he was covered in blood.

The priests were incensed and demanded that the guards immediately clear out Hundred Flowers Lane. Simultaneously, they were no longer prepared to wait for the discussion amongst their higher-ups to conclude, and decided to escort Tianhai Ya'er and that other person away. At this very moment, Tianhai Ya'er slapped his injured leg and shrilly shouted, "Murder!"

"The Li Palace is powerful, they're going to hound somebody to death! They hounded Liang Xiaoxiao to death, they hounded Zhuang Huanyu to death, and now they're going to hound me to death!"

"Come, I'll be watching you! If you hound me to death, just how are you going to explain it to my great-aunt!"

The Li Palace priests were all enraged, but they couldn't lay a hand on him.

Ever since the Divine Empress replaced Emperor Xian in reading memorials and took hold of the Imperial Court, in the following two hundred years, the Tianhai clan supplanted the Chen Imperial clan as the number one clan on the continent. The current Imperial Court of the Great Zhou was filled with the children and

disciples of the Tianhai clan and their power had flourished magnificently. Crucially, all the juniors of the Tianhai clan shared a common great-aunt—the Divine Empress.

Gazing around him at the eye-catching and brightly-colored plum blossoms and then turning to the tired expression of the archbishop, Priest Xin felt a complex set of emotions. He said, "If they continue to make such a ruckus, it'll be too much of a loss of face."

Mei Lisha slowly opened his eyes and gazed out the window. "In any case, since the Tianhai clan has already lost their face for so many years, they won't care about it."

Priest Xin asked, "Just how do we take care of this matter? If there's really no other option, I will bring some people and drive Tianhai Ya'er away."

Mei Lisha emotionlessly said, "Could it be that you cannot see that this is all a smoke screen?"

"A smoke screen?" Priest Xin suddenly remembered that piece of news that had come from the Li Palace and asked in astonishment, "Is Your Eminence speaking of that matter the two archbishops brought up a few days ago?"

Of the so-called Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy, in terms of qualifications and status, Mei Lisha was without question the head of the Six Prefects, but the other five were all considerably frightening personages. Mao Qiuyu was no longer the Principal of

the Heavenly Dao Academy. He had been appointed as the Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons and had become one of the Orthodoxy's Six Prefects. The two archbishops that Priest Xin was speaking of now were the [archbishops of the Hall of Subjugation and the Hall of Shadow Steps](#).

(It was previously stated that Mao Qiuyu was appointed Archbishop of the Hall of Subjugation. From now on, the author states that Mao Qiuyu was appointed Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons.)

Several years ago, these two archbishops had grown concerned that the Demon race was flourishing by the day. In order that the Orthodoxy could increase the battle prowess of human cultivators, they put forth a proposal—amongst the Six Ivies, excluding Star Seizer Academy, the teachers and students of these academies could challenge each other as long as they were of the same cultivation level. Without ample reason or an exception from the Li Palace, the target of this challenge could not refuse. Of course, there were also many additional rules and limitations.

No matter which angle you examined it from, this proposal was very reasonable and necessary. As a result, when it was first suggested, it received the support of all the halls and schools. The Imperial Court also praised it and Star Seizer Academy even demanded to be added into it. The problem was that those two archbishops that had made this proposal had been the Pope's most loyal assistants, but now, the entire continent knew that they firmly stood on the side of the Divine Empress—yes, these two archbishops were exactly the two that Mei Lisha had said had not yet made the turn few days ago. Now that the entire continent, especially the priests of the Li Palace, were all focused on the ruckus in front of the gate of the Orthodox Academy, these two archbishops were once more preparing to promote this plan. Just

what were they up to?

Priest Xin suddenly understood and his heart chilled. "His Holiness...will not agree."

"But is there a reason not to agree?" Mei Lisha's voice was rather exhausted.

"The Orthodox Academy currently only has Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po. Even if Tang Tang comes out of the Mausoleum of Books, there are still too few students. According to the rules of that proposal, the Orthodox Academy is too disadvantaged..."

"Two years ago when this proposal was made, the Orthodox Academy didn't have a single person, so you cannot accuse them of deliberately targeting the Orthodox Academy."

Finally, Mei Lisha added, "Currently, the Orthodox Academy only has three and a half students, but that is the Orthodox Academy's own problem to address."

At night, Priest Xin went to the Orthodox Academy and relayed the situation to Chen Changsheng.

"That person is called Zhou Ziheng (自横). He came from the Temple Seminary and is a priest of the Hall of Subjugation. He is a teacher at the Temple Seminary as well as an honored guest of the Tianhai clan."

"No man at the ferry, the boat drifts there, on its own?" (野渡无人舟自横)

"Zhou (周), the Zhou from 'careful' (周密)."

"Which 'heng' is it?"

"It's that 'heng' (横)."

Chen Changsheng thought about that tall and thin man next to the wheelchair and remembered the faint sense of ridicule on his face. He thought to himself that this truly was a very arrogant (骄横) individual.

"Zhou Ziheng has three identities, and any one of them is enough for him to take action if you move against Tianhai Ya'er." Priest Xin said with heartfelt sincerity, "Since you've already endured for three days, you might well as bear with it for a few more. If the Hall of Subjugation's proposal passes, we'll talk about how to deal with it when the time comes."

"Because Zhou Ziheng is a priest of the Hall of Subjugation, it's not convenient for the Li Palace priests guarding the Orthodox Academy to do anything against him..." Chen Changsheng fell silent for a few moments, then raised his head and seriously asked, "Then if that proposal really does pass and Zhou Ziheng challenges me, the Li Palace will also not do anything?"

Priest Xin affirmed, "Correct."

Chen Changsheng replied, "But he is at Star Condensation, one realm higher than me. According to the rules, I can reject it."

Priest Xin looked into his eyes and said, "He would challenge the Orthodox Academy and you are its principal. Or perhaps the Orthodox Academy has someone else that can take the challenge?"

Chen Changsheng looked back at him and said, "This position of principal was done by His Holiness and His Eminence. As for the Orthodox Academy having no other students, Sir most keenly understands the reason why."

Priest Xin felt somewhat embarrassed and said, "In short, as long as you endure for a few more days, His Holiness will definitely not leave you at a disadvantage."

Chen Changsheng said nothing more. After seeing him out of the academy, he walked back into the library and began to take in starlight and undergo Purification. He continued to cultivate his swordplay and continued his attempts to break through the secrets of the black monolith.

A night's time passed wordlessly and morning came once again. Tianhai Ya'er and that expert from the Hall of Subjugation called Zhou Ziheng also came.

Today, there was still a light wind, a fine drizzle, and also obscene language and abuse.

Chen Changsheng could bear it. In the end, those filthy obscenities were not heavily seasoned and fatty foods, and they were also not a bed filthy with dust. There was nothing in them that he could not bear. Yet at dusk, some rather unpleasant news came from the Li Palace. The proposal of those two archbishops had passed. Whether he could bear it or not was no longer important.

A letter of challenge was passed into the Orthodox Academy. On it was precisely the name of Zhou Ziheng.

Chen Changsheng gazed at that name in silence for a few moments, then he continued his Purification and continued to observe that black monolith.

At the moment, he could already clearly make out the lines on the monolith and had confirmed that it was the Heavenly Tome Monolith that Wang Zhice had left behind in Lingyan Pavilion. He could even distinctly sense that on the other end of the black monolith was truly the Qi of the Garden of Zhou.

Compared to the Heavenly Tome Monoliths and the Garden of Zhou, the tricks and plans of some people within the Tianhai clan and the Orthodoxy really didn't amount to much. However, when his spiritual sense strenuously crossed through that ocean of sword intent, he always felt like he could see a little boat in that vast ocean. That little boat swayed to and fro with the waves and seemed like it could be destroyed at any moment, yet it was not. It made him feel somewhat agitated.

He had always thought that the endless abuse being hurled out by Tianhai Ya'er and that incident last year where the gate to the academy had been knocked down were exactly the same. They were all disgracing the Tianhai clan.

But now he realized that even though he still believed his view to be correct, in the face of this sort of situation, just who wouldn't be angry?

On the morning of the next day, Priest Xin came with two more pieces of bad news.

Zhou Tong had refused to release Zhexiu; Zhexiu was still imprisoned in that sinister jail and nobody knew when he would come out. The entire continent knew that Zhou Tong was the Divine Empress's most loyal and most frightening dog. Compared to him, Xu Shiji was nothing much. Zhou Tong's unyielding attitude in this matter was an extremely ill omen to many people. A storm was about to engulf the city—could it really be that the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy would come into open conflict with each other?

Chen Changsheng asked, "This is the desire of His Holiness. His Eminence personally paid a visit and Zhou Tong still refused to release Zhexiu? Just what does he want to do?"

Priest Xin then relayed the second bad piece of news. "His Eminence's health has not been good. It might be a few days before he can pay a visit to Zhou Tong."

There was still some good news.

Zhexiu had not come out, but a certain person was about to come out.

At five o'clock in the morning, Chen Changsheng promptly woke up and left with Xuanyuan Po out the academy's gate. At this time, Tianhai Ya'er and Zhou Ziheng had not arrived.

To travel from the Orthodox Academy to the Mausoleum of Books was quite the distance. By the time they had reached that small river and arrived at the front gate of the Mausoleum of Books, it was already well into the morning.

Gazing at the verdant and lush green mountain, Chen Changsheng naturally began to think back to the first time he had come here to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao. And then, for some reason, he began to think of that mausoleum in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun. Soon after, he thought of that night several months ago, Wang Po and Mao Qiuyu standing where he was standing right now while he, Gou Hanshi and the others stood inside, carrying Xun Mei who was on the verge of death.

Mao Qiuyu was no longer the Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy. He had been appointed Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons and his status and authority were even greater. And yet he had been quiet for a very long time and it had been many days since the capital had heard any news of him.

Thinking of Zhuang Huanyu's death and the recent silence from

the Heavenly Dao Academy, he felt like he vaguely understood the reason why. His mood couldn't help but become somewhat serious.

A rumbling noise roused him. With the shaking of the ground, the heavy stone doors of the Mausoleum of Books slowly opened.

Translation Notes:

This chapter had quite a lot of wordplay which is difficult to convey through the translation. First, the title is a reference to a poem by Wei Yingwu, using the line 野渡无人舟自横, from the poem 'The West River at Ch'u-chou'. This line can be translated as 'No man at the ferry, the boat drifts there, on its own'. In the case of the title, the section about the boat is replaced with line about the mausoleum opening, 陵自开 replaces 舟自横. This line is referenced once again with the name Zhou 'Ziheng'. The last characters of this line are also 'Zhou Ziheng', but the 'Zhou' character is different. The 'Zhou' in the poem means 'boat' while the 'Zhou' used in the name can be used as part of the phrase 周密, meaning careful. Thus, in that section, Chen Changsheng is asking for clarification on the characters making up Zhou Ziheng's name, two of which happen to come from the poem. Lastly, the final bit of wordplay comes from the last character of the name, heng '横'. When used with the character 骄, it means arrogant/overbearing '骄横'.

Chapter 433 - The Sun In The Spring Rain

Gradually, in the company of the morning light, people began to walk out of the Mausoleum of Books. The majority of them were people who had entered the three banners of the Grand Examination held this year at the beginning of spring. It was naturally impossible for those people to not recognize Chen Changsheng. They were all astonished, and then one by one, began to pay their respects. In that night of descending starlight, countless monolith viewers broke through and several dozen fireworks bloomed over the Mausoleum of Books. No matter what sort of impression these people had of Chen Changsheng, they all owed him a debt of gratitude and had to express their thanks.

Chen Changsheng returned their salutes, then turned his gaze back to look into the Mausoleum of Books.

After some time had passed, Tang Thirty-Six finally came out. His hair was disheveled and his entire body stank. His expensive clothing was stained all over and he carried his bedding over his shoulder, as well as that furskin whose original color was completely unrecognizable. He didn't seem one bit like the elegant noble son doted upon by countless young women. He was rather more like a beggar that had just emerged from some broken-down mansion with property of rather questionable worth.

But the greatest change was none of these, it was his eyes.

His eyes were very bright.

Before, his eyes had also been very bright, but it had been a sort of limpid light. The light in his eyes was still limpid, but now there seemed to be a sharpness about it such that even his filthy air couldn't conceal it.

"I almost couldn't recognize it was you," Chen Changsheng said to him.

"More handsome?" Tang Thirty-Six's sword-like eyebrows lightly rose up with an indescribable sense of frivolity.

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, as expected, this sort of you is much easier to recognize. He shook his head and said, "Dirtier."

As he spoke, he very naturally and almost imperceptibly took one step back, standing just a little bit farther from Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six handed the bedding and furskin he was carrying over to Xuanyuan Po and then laughed heartily and embraced Chen Changsheng.

Xuanyuan Po looked at the filthy and stinking bedding and furskin in his hands, his face a picture of helplessness.

No helplessness could be seen on Chen Changsheng's face, because he was using his hands to cover his face, preventing himself from smelling or touching those dirty objects.

Tang Thirty-Six released his embrace and asked with satisfaction, "Do you see any change in me?"

Chen Changsheng very sincerely looked him over from head to toe, then asked, "The Wenshui clan has cut you off and you're beginning your new life as an independent?"

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Just where did these words come from?"

Chen Changsheng pointed at the bedding in Xuanyuan Po's arms and said, "If this was the Tang Tang of the past, how could he possibly carry out the bedding that Sir Xun used for several decades?"

"You don't understand anything. This is something so that I can remember."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, just what are you remembering?

"To remember the time we spent in the Mausoleum of Books viewing the monoliths and comprehending the Dao."

Tang Thirty-Six turned around and looked back at the green mountain of the mausoleum. He said sentimentally, "For people like you guys who sought the treasures of the Garden of Zhou and didn't complete your time viewing the monoliths, what words would be sufficient to describe this?"

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to answer this. He said, "It looks like your time in the Mausoleum of Books has not been bad."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "It can be considered okay. A few days ago, I barely managed to push into the upper level of Ethereal Opening."

As he said 'upper level of Ethereal Opening', his expression was intentionally very flat and his tone was neutral, but both Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po could see his pride.

Chen Changsheng recalled that when he was leaving the Mausoleum of Books, Tang Thirty-Six had just broken into Ethereal Opening. Not even several months had passed, but he had already broken through two thresholds and cultivated to the upper level of Ethereal Opening. He truly deserved to be proud, but Chen Changsheng couldn't help but think to himself, with this guy's character, it's absolutely impossible for him to maintain this understated attitude until the end. Just as expected, in the next moment, Tang Thirty-Six shed his disguise and turned around to Chen Changsheng with a radiant smile. "You guys don't even know, I've even been casually teaching Guan Feibai how to conduct himself in my spare time."

To achieve breakthroughs in cultivation was an incredibly difficult task, and to break through three thresholds in such a short time was even more unimaginable. Tang Thirty-Six's excitement was easy to understand, yet it was truly difficult for Chen Changsheng to be excited with him. Seeing Chen Changsheng's calm face, Tang Thirty-Six remembered that his good luck in this period of viewing monoliths in the Mausoleum of

Books was due to the night that Chen Changsheng had filled with starlight. He couldn't help but feel a little embarrassed and so said, "Of course, I have you to thank for this, but ultimately, it's because my talent was high enough."

Chen Changsheng gave a relatively objective conclusion, "It's primarily because after you entered the Orthodox Academy, you stopped slacking off."

This was also the argument that elder of unmatched intelligence from the Pavilion of Divination had once made in his commentary when announcing the Proclamation of Azure Sky.

Tang Thirty-Six found himself incapable of responding to this. He could only say, "You aren't going to congratulate me?"

"Congratulations," Chen Changsheng said without the least sincerity, then he turned back to the Mausoleum of Books and asked confusedly, "What about Gou Hanshi and the others? Why haven't they come out yet?"

Liang Xiaoxiao and Qi Jian had left the Mausoleum of Books in advance so they could enter the Garden of Zhou. Of the Mount Li disciples, Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, and Liang Banhu had made the same choice as Tang Thirty-Six and continued to stay in the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao. Although the Orthodoxy made no requirement of when people should leave the Mausoleum of Books and there was no set rule, in Chen Changsheng's thinking, since so many people had concluded their monolith viewing, they should also be coming out. But after looking for so long, he still didn't see the figures of those

three.

Tang Thirty-Six explained, "Originally we had all agreed to come out of the Mausoleum of Books together, but some sort of pressing affair occurred back at Mount Li, so they left last night."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, so that was it.

Seeing his expression, Tang Thirty-Six asked in a different tone, "Do you know what happened at Mount Li?"

Chen Changsheng affirmed. He naturally knew that something big had occurred at Mount Li.

If it weren't such a serious concern, nobody would disturb the monolith viewers in the Mausoleum of Books. Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat astonished and asked, "What happened?"

Chen Changsheng indicated that Xuanyuan Po should throw the stinky and sour bedding and furskin onto the carriage, then said to Tang Thirty-Six, "We'll talk about it after we get back."

Tang Thirty-Six abruptly remembered something. He stuck his hand into the bedding and rummaged around in it for quite a while. Taking out a letter and a notebook, he handed them over to Chen Changsheng and said, "Gou Hanshi wanted me to give these things to you."

Chen Changsheng recognized that the notebook was the one that

Xun Mei had left behind. It had once helped him walk a much more direct path as he viewed the monoliths and comprehended the Dao, and it also had helped those youths that he had lived with under the same roof.

The letter was one that Gou Hanshi had left behind and its contents were very ordinary. It said that he had to leave the capital in advance and that they could not meet, so he could only use the brush to send his greeting. The future days were as high as the mountains and as long as a river. Presumably, there would be a day when they would meet again.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the letter and said mockingly, "Our friends from Mount Li still don't seem convinced."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Why can't you think of people more optimistically? Gou Hanshi definitely didn't have the meaning you're talking about."

Tang Thirty-Six abruptly said, "I heard...you are the Principal of the Orthodox Academy."

After hesitating for a while, Chen Changsheng said, "It seems...I am."

The rumor had been confirmed and Tang Thirty-Six fell into silence. Then he said to Chen Changsheng with heartfelt sincerity, "Your identity and status are no longer the same—you can't be as childish and naive as you were before."

As he said this, he patted Chen Changsheng on the shoulder.

As Chen Changsheng looked at the filthy hand on his shoulder, the corners of his lips couldn't help but stretch out. However, he didn't argue with Tang Thirty-Six over anything.

This was the meaning of 'the waters are no longer as deep after seeing the sea, the clouds lose their color after visiting Mount Wu, and the light of a pearl the size of rice is nothing before the magnificence of a Night Pearl'. On this matter, even Su Li had lost to him, so there was nothing to boast about if he also won over this guy.

Returning to Hundred Flowers Lane, the carriage stopped. Seeing all those priests from the Li Palace bowing to Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six felt somewhat out of place. He jumped off the carriage and headed into a little store at the street's entrance.

Xuanyuan Po remained on the carriage, returning to the Orthodox Academy ahead of them with those worn-out furnishings.

Chen Changsheng followed Tang Thirty-Six, watching him buy two youtiao and a bowl of soy milk then eat them as he headed into the street.

These were clearly the simplest and most commonly seen foods, but Tang Thirty-Six ate them with gusto, his head swaying around in his delight.

"Does it taste that good?" Chen Changsheng asked inquisitively.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "You don't know, in the Mausoleum of Books, everything else is okay, but the food was just abominable, especially after you and Qi Jian left...can that idiot Guan Feibai cook? I even began to reminisce about the food that Xuanyuan Po made, and even began to think that the food at the Orthodox Academy was tastier than the grand feast served at Clear Lake Restaurant. How miserable do you think I was?"

Chen Changsheng thought that this truly was very miserable, and when he imagined that scene of the arrogant and ruthless Guan Feibai in that little house cutting dried meat and cooking green peppers, he couldn't help but shake his head. It was truly very difficult to imagine.

Tang Thirty-Six took the half piece of youtiao in his hand and dunked it in the off-white soy milk. He asked, "Do you want a bit?"

Chen Changsheng looked at Tang Thirty-Six's finger in the soy milk, thought of the dirt he had seen under that finger's nail, and immediately waved his hands and said, "No need."

Tang Thirty-Six was very scornful, saying, "Do you know how to live?"

Chen Changsheng helplessly said, "Although I know you've been holding yourself back these past years while acting as a noble son, that right now is your true temperament...can you not speak so rudely? Hearing it really is grating on the ear."

Tang Thirty-Six readily accepted his advice, then raised up the bowl carrying his soy milk and seemed to offer it up to the heavens. Looking at the sun that was just about to be obscured by the clouds, he said, "Sun."

Amidst joking and eating, the two entered Hundred Flowers Lane and met head-on with Zhou Ziheng, who was standing there holding a paper umbrella.

Suddenly, the sun was completely obscured by dark clouds. Raindrops began to fall, descending upon that paper umbrella that seemed like it couldn't even hold up against the wind.

This scene was very miraculous, and there was a vague sense that an indescribably mysterious principle was at work.

Zhou Ziheng seemed to have prepared in advance for the rain. This signified a sort of realm; it indicated that he had already begun to peer into the Dao of the heavens and earth.

Yet upon seeing this scene, the first thing Chen Changsheng thought about was why he wasn't carrying an umbrella a few days ago when it was raining. Soon after, he remembered that letter of challenge—this person wanted to represent the Temple Seminary in challenging the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six cared even less about this scene. He didn't know who this tall and slender man was and he was rather irritated at the sun's sudden disappearance. It was only because he was

keeping in mind Chen Changsheng's words that he didn't say much, only requesting, "Please let me pass."

Saying this, he began walking forward.

Zhou Ziheng didn't give way, as if he didn't even see him.

There was no place in his eyes for this stinking youth in shabby clothes.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "Have you finished considering?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I've considered it. I will give you a reply."

Zhou Ziheng smiled and said, "Could it be that you plan to consider it until the end?"

This smile was extremely repulsive, carrying a faint sense of sarcasm and derision.

Tang Thirty-Six froze. It was impossible for him to imagine that there was somebody in the Great Zhou Dynasty that would dare to stand in front of the Orthodox Academy and speak to him and Chen Changsheng with this sort of attitude.

"Who is this?" He asked Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng said, "Zhou Ziheng."

Tang Thirty-Six had never heard this name before. "Zhou Ziheng? Who is that?"

Zhou Ziheng was irritated, thinking that Chen Changsheng and this beggar of a youth were deliberately using this conversation to humiliate him.

Tang Thirty-Six turned his body and looked at Zhou Ziheng, asking, "I said, just who are you?"

Zhou Ziheng emotionlessly said, "Zhou Ziheng of the Hall of Subjugation."

Tang Thirty-Six continued to look at him and asked, "You are very famous?"

Zhou Ziheng didn't know how to respond to this question.

"How baffling."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him like he was an idiot, then he turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "You must be clear about your current status. A person that no one has ever heard of, there's no need to pay him any attention. Can he reach you?"

After saying his piece, he carried the soy milk and youtiao past Zhou Ziheng, heading into the street.

Zhou Ziheng lowered his head and took in a deep breath.

Tang Thirty-Six halted his steps.

The rain fell into disorder, then began to blow about once more like willow leaves.

Zhou Ziheng appeared in front of Tang Thirty-Six, preventing him from moving forward.

The Hundred Flowers Lane was silent.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him, then very calmly said four words.

"Hey, idiot, move aside."

At this time, Tang Thirty-Six—with his body covered in filth, a stench that assailed the nose, and his shabby clothes—really did seem just like a beggar, but his manner was like that of a prince.

Because he had never been a beggar, but rather the world's wealthiest prince.

His wealth was greater than that of the Princess of Ping, Luoluo,

and Nanke—these actual princesses—all added together.

So when he said these four words, he was overbearing to an unimaginable degree.

Was it possible to be unimaginably overbearing? Yes, because this was not an unbridled air, but a confident one.

A confidence that was impossible to nurture without a thousand years' worth of secrets.

Zhou Ziheng narrowed his eyes and stared at Tang Thirty-Six, killing intent gradually rising.

Yet, he ultimately did not attack.

Because Chen Changsheng was watching him.

Many Li Palace priests were also watching him.

What made him most wary and most puzzled was that amongst the imperial guards that should have stood on his side, there suddenly arose an unconcealed and violent killing intent!

He was keenly aware that if he really did attack, then that killing intent would shred him into pieces in the very next moment.

For some reason he wasn't clear on, his hands began to shiver.

Tang Thirty-Six once again passed by him, his left hand carrying the bowl of soy milk while his right hand held a youtiao, still not even giving Zhou Ziheng a glance.

The rain slowly fell, landing on the paper umbrella and then falling away without a sound.

From the depths of Hundred Flowers Lane came the taunts and abuse of Tianhai Ya'er.

Hearing those filthy obscenities, Tang Thirty-Six's face became rather unsightly.

Walking up to the Orthodox Academy's gate, he only saw Tianhai Ya'er sitting on his wheelchair, constantly cursing at the gate.

"Chen Changsheng, you..."

"If you have the ability, come and hit me!"

Tang Thirty-Six walked up to Tianhai Ya'er's back and didn't stop him. Instead, he very attentively inclined his head and listened.

Many priests and guards, as well as common folk of the capital who had hurried over upon hearing the news, were all gawking at this scene.

The rain fell over Hundred Flowers Lane like mist.

Chen Changsheng asked, "What are you doing?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Reminiscing on life."

Tianhai Ya'er heard his voice and turned his head, his expression subtly shifting.

Chen Changsheng still didn't understand and asked, "What life?"

"I'm very earnestly reminiscing on my life." Tang Thirty-Six sighed emotionally, "...motherf***, I've really never heard such lowly demands before."

Chapter 434 - The Stick Of The Orthodox Academy

Although Tang Thirty-Six currently possessed a completely disgusting appearance and was dressed very shabbily, totally unlike his rumored appearance, his sharp and unkind words and that free and uncaring energy about his appearance let Tianhai Ya'er recognize who he was very quickly. His face quickly became extremely ugly.

Back then, he had gone to the Heavenly Dao Academy to take part in the Ivy Festival precisely because Tang Thirty-Six had announced to the entire capital that he was going to cripple Tianhai Ya'er.

The final outcome of this affair was that because of the restriction of the teachers of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Tang Thirty-Six was unable to participate in the Ivy Festival. Tianhai Ya'er, looking for an excuse to act violently, crippled one of Xuanyuan Po's arms, but then was soon after crippled by Luoluo.

The two individuals had never been able to formally meet, but did this not hinder Tianhai Ya'er from placing the blame for his crippled status on Tang Thirty-Six.

He stared at Tang Thirty-Six, his face pale and his eyes chock-full of bitter resentment, wishing that he could just destroy him. But he did nothing. On the contrary, hearing Tang Thirty-Six's words and associating them with this guy's rumored temperament, an inauspicious omen appeared in his heart. With his sharp voice, he rushed to say, "I was talking to Chen Changsheng! It has nothing to

do with you!"

There was a sort of 'just come and hit me' feeling to it as well.

Tianhai Ya'er was a scoundrel, shameless and sinister. He was daring enough to say these words to anyone, including Chen Changsheng, but Tang Thirty-Six was the sole exception.

Because he knew Tang Thirty-Six really could discard any sense of shame and strike him.

Tang Thirty-Six was a little surprised, finding it a little hard to believe that this guy could respond so quickly. He couldn't think of a better method, so he decided to just be unreasonable. "I don't care. In any case, I want to fight with you."

Saying this, he turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "Help me roll up my sleeves."

Right now, his left hand was holding a bowl of soy milk and his right hand was holding half of a youtiao. It really was impossible for him to roll up his sleeves on his own.

Rolling up the sleeves was an action that everyone understood the significance of. It was a signal to begin something.

Tianhai Ya'er's complexion was a little pale. "I definitely won't fight with you. In any case, I'm a cripple. If you're not afraid of losing face, then you can do it yourself."

Chen Changsheng was precisely pondering whether to roll up Tang Thirty-Six's sleeves or not, but when he heard the words 'not afraid of losing face', he thought to himself, it's fine, I don't need to think about it anymore.

Just as expected, when Tang Thirty-Six heard these words, not only did he lack any hesitation, his eyes shone. He asked, "What is face?"

Tianhai Ya'er looked at him uneasily and said, "What are you thinking of doing? Don't tell me you plan to bully a cripple like me in front of so many people?"

The misty rain shrouded Hundred Flowers Lane. The force of the rain was not very great and was even gradually weakening. The priests and guards responsible for keeping the peace had already blockaded the lane against the many spectators.

Tianhai Ya'er's reputation in the capital was extremely awful, but he was still only a youth that hadn't even reached the age of fourteen. Moreover, he had already been a cripple for almost a year, his two legs now so thin that they looked like two beanpoles. He looked very pitiful. If someone were to attack him, wheelchair-bound as he was, they might provoke many criticisms. But how could Tang Thirty-Six fear any criticisms or censure?

He looked at Tianhai Ya'er and smiled. "Did you know, when I was very small, there was one thing that I loved to do the most."

Tianhai Ya'er stared into his eyes, his voice slightly shaky. "What thing?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "My favorite thing to do was take up a staff and chase around dogs that had fallen into the river, hitting them nonstop."

Tianhai Ya'er understood his meaning and a cold shiver ran through him. In his shaky voice, he shouted, "Someone come quickly! The sole grandson of the Wenshui Tangs is beating someone up! He wants to use some underhanded method on a cripple like me!"

Tang Thirty-Six was also in no hurry, allowing him to yell. Only after Tianhai Ya'er's voice had finally come to a stop did he turn to the crowd outside the street and declare, "Everyone has clearly seen that I haven't hit him with my hands."

He truly hadn't hit Tianhai Ya'er, not even brushed his clothes.

As he spoke, he even raised up his the soy milk and youtiao in his two hands, indicating to the crowd that even if he wanted to, he couldn't hit Tianhai Ya'er.

Then his expression suddenly turned cold, and his foot delivered a ruthless kick to Tianhai Ya'er's chest!

Thud!

Tianhai Ya'er was kicked with his wheelchair into the rainwater, and his head began to bleed from the fall.

Tang Thirty-Six had kicked too ruthlessly. The crippled youth was curled up like a shrimp, his face extremely pale and in so much pain that he couldn't even speak.

The area in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate and the outside of the Hundred Flowers Lane were both deathly still. Nobody said anything.

Nobody had thought that this youth who had been smiling at them while holding up the soy milk and youtiao, chuckling like an idiot, would in the next moment deliver such a fierce blow to the crippled youth in the wheelchair!

The Tianhai clan bodyguards and Zhou Ziheng also had not imagined this, so they were far too late to stop it.

With the whistling of the wind, the Tianhai clan's bodyguards quickly rushed onto the scene and placed Tianhai Ya'er under their protection.

Zhou Ziheng had tossed away that paper umbrella a while ago, his right hand already gripping the hilt of his sword. With an expression of fury, he glared at Tang Thirty-Six, apparently ready to attack in the next moment.

Tang Thirty-Six continued to ignore this Star Condensation

expert. Looking around at the crowd, he raised the soy milk and the youtiao in his hands even higher and declared, "Everyone can clearly see, I really didn't use my hands, much less attack with them. I used a kick."

It really was like this. He hadn't used any underhanded methods against Tianhai Ya'er. He had used his foot.

With an angry roar, Zhou Ziheng pulled his sword out of its sheath. His sword intent abruptly soared, reverberating in that space in front of the Orthodox Academy.

The target of this powerful sword intent was obviously Tang Thirty-Six.

In viewing the monoliths and comprehending the Dao in the Mausoleum of Books and through diligent cultivation, Tang Thirty-Six's level had advanced rapidly. At his age, he performed the unimaginable feat of cultivating to the upper level of Ethereal Opening. But he was still not an opponent for someone at the Star Condensation Realm.

And yet, he still continued to ignore Zhou Ziheng, entering through the gate of the Orthodox Academy without even looking at him.

From the moment he walked into Hundred Flowers Lane and set eyes on Zhou Ziheng, he understood that this person desperately wanted to be seen by the world. Thereby, from that moment on, he didn't even glance at him.

Of course, this was a humiliation.

Zhou Ziheng was a priest of the Hall of Subjugation, an honored guest of the Tianhai clan, and also a teacher of the Temple Seminary. He had the right to be arrogant about any one of these identities.

How could an arrogant man possibly endure such humiliation? So even though he already knew of Tang Thirty-Six's identity, he still took out his sword.

He could not take out his sword.

There was only the sound of many bowstrings being drawn taut.

Several dozen guards stood in front of Tang Thirty-Six's back, the divine crossbows in their hands held level, the crossbow darts sharp and carrying the fluctuations of Qi. They were extremely frightening.

A deputy general stood behind, his face austere. His hand gripped the hilt of his sword as he stared into Zhou Ziheng's eyes. The warning was exceptionally clear: if he moved, he would die.

Tang Thirty-Six and Chen Changsheng entered the Orthodox Academy. As the gates closed, they clapped.

Just like the sound of a crisp slap.

Tianhai Ya'er was helped up by the bodyguards. His face was pale and his suffering unbearable.

Zhou Ziheng stood in the fine rain, his face pale. He coldly asked that deputy general, "I would like to know, does Divine General Xue know of this matter?"

As everyone knew, the guards responsible for the safety of the capital were all under the command of the second-ranked Divine General, Xue Xingchuan, and that Divine General had always been loyal to the Divine Empress.

Today, the attitude the guards had displayed before the gate of the Orthodox Academy was clearly hostile to the Tianhai clan.

The deputy general looked at Zhou Ziheng like he was an idiot. "The family of my maternal grandfather only has this single child. If I don't block you, does that mean you want your entire family to be killed?"

Saying this, he waved his hand, indicating that his subordinates should disperse. He then walked over to the inn across the road from the Orthodox Academy to continue drinking tea and gazing off into the distance.

Inside the Orthodox Academy, Xuanyuan Po and Chen Changsheng enthusiastically sandwiched Tang Thirty-Six as they

walked into the library.

"All this enthusiasm from you guys really makes me feel uncomfortable." Tang Thirty-Six looked at the expressions on their faces and thought it somewhat strange.

Chen Changsheng's face was one of complete relief and Xuanyuan Po also looked as if a great burden had been lifted.

"You don't know, these past few days, that crippled little monster was out there in front of the gate every day yelling abuse and profanity. We really almost couldn't take it, so we just looked forward to your return."

Chen Changsheng said to him in gratitude, "As expected, the moment you came back, you completely settled the matter, or else I really wouldn't know what to do."

Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat proud and also somewhat irritated. "You just let him sit in front of the gate and curse? Grow up!"

Chen Changsheng said awkwardly, "I really don't have any experience dealing with this sort of thing."

Beside him, Xuanyuan Po added, "Tianhai Ya'er wielded his crippled status to blindly curse at us. He doesn't even care about his pride, what could we do? Are you saying we really should have just beaten him up?"

Tang Thirty-Six thought to himself, didn't I just give him a good kick? I kicked very happily, so why can't you?

Chen Changsheng said helplessly, "That guy right now is just like a pile of feces. No matter how you handle it, you can't avoid getting your hands dirty, so we were forced to wait for your return."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Why did you need to wait for me to come back?"

Chen Changsheng turned around and looked out the window at the scenery.

Xuanyuan Po was more honest. "You have more experience in this aspect. In addition, we also know that you care even less about your pride than he does."

Tang Thirty-Six was a little astonished when hearing this, and then became furious. "What does that mean? You two both better tell me clearly what this means! Could it be that in your view, I'm also just a pile of shit?"

Xuanyuan Po was momentarily speechless, not knowing how to explain. He wanted to say a few words to clarify, but then he realized he didn't know how to say it.

Chen Changsheng said consolingly, "Our meaning is that your ability to pester endlessly and be unafraid of filth just happens to

be of use against this sort of person."

Tang Thirty-Six reconstructed this sentence in his mind and got even angrier. "Isn't that just a stick that you use to move around shit? How is that any better!"

Of course, he wasn't really angry, just playing around. Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po truly could only wait for Tang Thirty-Six's return. Neither of them was good with words, much less scheming. Luoluo naturally had that ability, but her status was far too sensitive. Thus, if they wanted to solve the problem currently confronting the Orthodox Academy, they could only place their hopes on Tang Thirty-Six. In fact, there were very few people that noticed that Tang Thirty-Six had been responsible for solving many of the problems the Orthodox Academy had faced.

Hearing Chen Changsheng explain the new rule of the Orthodoxy, Tang Thirty-Six pondered it, then dunked the youtiao in his hands into the bowl of soy milk and declared, "Drown them to death."

Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po didn't understand—what did he mean by drowning them to death?

Chapter 435 - What Are We Discussing Together?

"You guys don't need to worry about it anymore. I'll solve it." Tang Thirty-Six didn't explain too much to them, only saying, "If I can't solve it, then my name's not Tang Thirty-Six."

These words were said with extreme self-confidence, but Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po were more concerned with three other problems. Firstly, a lot of rain had fallen into this bowl of soy milk; how much more diluted was it now? Secondly, that youtiao had been in his hand for such a long time; just how dirty was it now? Lastly, Tang Thirty-Six changing his name was a very common occurrence. Why was it that this sort of promise sounded somewhat unreliable?

His name originally wasn't Tang Thirty-Six, it was Tang Tang. In addition, he was in the upper level of Ethereal Opening, so it was a given that he would leave the Proclamation of Azure Sky and enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, it was just that his exact rank wasn't known. Presumably, he would not be so fortuitous as to be ranked thirty-sixth again. Moreover, in the previous changing of ranks for the Proclamation of Azure Sky, he had used the excuse that his new rank didn't sound very nice to not change his name. This time, it would be difficult for him to use a similar reason to pass it off.

Xuanyuan Po felt that these words of Tang Thirty-Six were too lacking in sincerity. Shaking his head, he walked out of the library.

Chen Changsheng wanted to clear this up, but then he had

second thoughts. He really didn't understand all this very much, so he decided to keep it to himself. Instead, he asked, "What name are you planning on changing to this time?"

"Let me think...I should be able to get into the top thirty?"

"This is the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, not the Proclamation of Azure Sky."

"So what of it? I'm at the upper level of Ethereal Opening! As long as I'm not lazy, I'll catch up to you eventually, minute by minute," Tang Thirty-Six proudly declared.

His face was caked with dust, but it was possible to see that his skin had gotten somewhat paler. In addition, he was also much thinner. It was clearly evident that his time cultivating in the Mausoleum of Books had been incredibly arduous.

At such an age, to be able to enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, and to also be so self-confident to think that he could enter the top thirty, was an extremely rare sight and he truly was deserving of being proud.

Chen Changsheng was happy for him from the bottom of his heart. He said, "You have to continue working hard."

Tang Thirty-Six was rather disgusted at these words. "You really are acting like a principal."

Chen Changsheng began to laugh and prepared to apologize when suddenly, Tang Thirty-Six sighed.

"What's wrong?"

"As soon as I thought about how you and Xu Yourong ran ahead so quickly, how my extraordinary achievement actually won't be able to shock the world, only my relatives back in Wenshui, it really made me lose all my strength."

Saying this, Tang Thirty-Six stood up and looked around the library. He abruptly asked, "It's fine if Princess Luoluo didn't come to welcome me, but what of Zhexiu?"

In his mind, wolf youth Zhexiu was an excellent student that he had paid a heavy price to buy for the Orthodox Academy. The problems currently facing the Orthodox Academy were exactly problems that required Zhexiu to solve, so he couldn't let him go.

Chen Changsheng said, "There are some things that I haven't had the time to tell you."

Tang Thirty-Six turned to him and asked, "What things?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Zhexiu is currently in Zhou Prison."

From the time Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu left the Mausoleum of Books and entered the Garden of Zhou to this day—this story seemed rather long, but telling it actually didn't require much

time. The youtiao in the soy milk didn't even have time to soften up.

"So...it turns out so many things happened," Tang Thirty-Six concluded. "We can disregard the other matters for the moment, but we spent money on Zhexiu. We have to get him out as quickly as possible."

Zhexiu was a person the Orthodox Academy had spent money on, so he was a person of the Orthodox Academy. Since he was a person of the Orthodox Academy, the Orthodox Academy had to protect him. This was a very simple line of reasoning.

Moreover, Zhou Prison was an incredibly terrifying place. To stay in there for one day was like staying for a year in the abyss of the underworld.

Chen Changsheng was also very worried about Zhexiu. It was just that the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court were currently in conflict with each other and there were also internal problems within the Li Palace. And now, even Archbishop Mei Lisha was not feeling well. He was quite at a loss for what to do.

"From a certain perspective, Zhou Tong is just like that Tianhai Ya'er that you guys couldn't deal with, just countless times more terrifying and powerful. To reach his goal, he could do any kind of cruel and deplorable deed. Everyone knows that he's the Divine Empress's mad dog. Whoever the Empress wants him to bite, he bites. To a person like him, all strategies and plans are useless."

"But why does he continue to so doggedly bite on to the Orthodox Academy?"

"Because His Holiness has expressed his position. The position of Emperor of the Great Zhou will probably return to the Imperial clan, but the Empress clearly doesn't think this way."

Chen Changsheng lowered his head and said, "In truth...I really don't understand just why the position of emperor is so important."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him like he was a freak and said, "It's the Emperor of the Great Zhou, the position of supreme authority! Nobody can resist the temptation of that throne."

Chen Changsheng raised his head and looked back. "But I really don't think that it's that great. I've always felt that the time and energy needed for all this is really very unreasonable."

Tang Thirty-Six looked into his eyes. They were still limpid and clean without the smallest hint of falsehood. He couldn't help but be a little moved. "Do you really think this way?"

"Yes," Chen Changsheng replied.

"Chen Changsheng you really are a freak, a real freak, not abnormal like Tianhai Ya'er."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and said, "You can't understand

us, but I also find it very difficult to understand you and why you don't care about these things."

Chen Changsheng thought about it, then said, "Perhaps it's because I've seen things that are even more important?"

"Such as?"

"...life and death."

Outside of life and death, everything else was other people's business.

Life and death are also matters of great importance.

There were no other important events in life, only birth and death.

These were all things written in the scriptures that people had once said.

Chen Changsheng was well-read in the Daoist Canon and could remember a lot, but it was not necessary. It was enough that he remembered the two words 'life' and 'death'.

To an ordinary person, death was something they would have to face in the later part of their one hundred years.

To cultivators, death was something they would face in the later part of their several hundred years.

To Chen Changsheng, life and death had always been right before his eyes. It was always on his mind, making him keep it in his mind constantly.

In front of life and death, how could he possibly show any interest to those attachments of life? At the very least, before he resolved this problem of his, he would not be too interested in them.

Tang Thirty-Six didn't know of Chen Changsheng's problem, but when he heard the words 'life and death', he for some reason felt like the rain outside the window had brought a sudden chill unbecoming of summer.

Soon after, Chen Changsheng began to think about other things.

He thought about the ill archbishop and the internal disputes of the Orthodoxy, and he also thought about those words that Su Li had once said to him. He said, "Is this world really so unbearable?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "At the very least, it's not as clean we hope it to be, just like how nobody understands how you could become Principal of the Orthodox Academy."

Even after he had performed such great merits for the Orthodoxy and the Great Zhou in the Mausoleum of Books and the Garden of

Zhou, Chen Changsheng was only sixteen years old. There was absolutely no justification for why he should be the Principal of the Orthodox Academy.

In the view of Tang Thirty-Six as well as many other people that didn't know the inside story, this matter was certainly very fishy. There must have been many exchanges carried out that couldn't see the light of day, or perhaps inside information.

Chen Changsheng did not believe that these matters could not see the light of day. He could at least tell Tang Thirty-Six.

"My teacher is His Holiness's senior brother."

His gaze looked out the window and rested on the verdant campus of the Orthodox Academy. "He was the previous Principal of the Orthodox Academy."

Tang Thirty-Six was in absolute shock. He was even more shocked than when Chen Changsheng had reached the part of his story about Su Li and Xunyang City.

The bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy ten-odd years ago had directly or indirectly changed the entirety of the human world. Even the Longevity Sect and Mount Li in the distant south had been greatly impacted.

The previous Principal of the Orthodox Academy, that was a powerful figure that no one could forget, even though his name

had long been struck from the annals of the Orthodoxy and was forbidden from being mentioned in the capital.

"No wonder you're just some Daoist youth from the countryside but are actually able to know the Daoist Canon so well. No wonder why His Holiness let you become the Principal of the Orthodox Academy and seeks to nurture you as his successor...no wonder Zhou Tong would work behind the scenes against the Orthodox Academy." Tang Thirty-Six gazed at him, mumbling, "As it turns out, you were that powerful figure's only successor."

Chen Changsheng corrected him, "No, I also have a senior."

When he was leaving Xining Village, his teacher had explained a few things to him, so ever since he had arrived at the capital, he rarely brought up his senior. Until now, he had only acknowledged this to Xu Yourong and Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "You also have a senior? What sort of person is he?"

Chen Changsheng pondered this question and realized that Senior Yu Ren was truly very difficult to describe with words. Perhaps it was because Senior never spoke?

"Senior...is a very extraordinary person."

"How extraordinary? Could he be more extraordinary than me?"

"Senior is ten thousand times more extraordinary than the past you. Now that you've gotten more diligent, Senior is only one hundred times more extraordinary than you."

Chen Changsheng looked at him as he spoke. He wasn't intentionally mocking or disparaging Tang Thirty-Six. This was a conclusion he had reached after earnest consideration.

Tang Thirty-Six did not speak for a very long time. Finally, he said, "It seems that he really is a very extraordinary person."

Chen Changsheng agreed, "Yes, he's my idol."

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly asked, "Just what does your teacher want to do?"

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng replied, "I don't understand your meaning."

Tang Thirty-Six looked into his eyes and said, "You should have a clear understanding of what I mean."

As Daoist Ji was not merely Daoist Ji, but also the previous Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the leader of the opposition against the Divine Empress, everything he did was worthy of careful consideration.

He was probably keenly aware that Chen Changsheng's origins could not be kept a secret forever. Through Mei Lisha and the

Pope's attitude, one could even confirm that he had gotten in touch with the Li Palace before Chen Changsheng had even arrived at the capital. Thus, he should be even more certain that the Divine Empress would, sooner or later, discover Chen Changsheng's origins. This also signified that Chen Changsheng's situation would become extremely difficult, even incredibly dangerous. But he still insisted on sending Chen Changsheng to the capital to take the examination, and he didn't even give him any explanation. Why was this? Just because of that engagement with Xu Yourong?

This was a very important question. It was just that Chen Changsheng had never thought about it, or perhaps, he had intentionally not allowed himself to think about it.

Until Tang Thirty-Six pierced through this window paper.

"Reporting to the Lord. The newest information has been sent over from Hanshan County. There really was a person practicing medicine called Daoist Ji in that area, but by the time the scout cavalry had hurried over, that person had already disappeared."

"It is Principal Shang, not even the Empress could kill him back then. How could we possibly be able to find him?"

Zhou Tong sat behind the table, not raising his head as he carefully looked over the dozen or so case reports that had been sent over last night.

The subordinate stood in front of the table and said in a low voice, "According to the reports from Xining Village, we've

verified, Daoist Ji...the traitor Shang really does have another disciple."

Zhou Tong's finger that was just then flipping a page suddenly paused. And then Zhou Tong raised his head.

Chapter 436 - Koi, Sinking Into The Pool, And The Brilliance Of A Metal Blade

Zhou Tong put down the file and turned to his subordinate, asking, "Confirmed?"

The subordinate took a portrait from his chest and said, "Absolutely true."

Zhou Tong did not take the portrait, just examined it with his two eyes in silence.

The subordinate continued, "According to our records, in Chen Changsheng's entire year in the capital, he never mentioned this person."

Zhou Tong gazed out the window at the daylight for a very long time. Suddenly, he said, "Speak, do you think Crown Prince Zhaoming actually died, or was he secretly taken away by those traitorous fellows from the Imperial clan that refuse to die?"

The subordinate didn't know how to answer. Extremely nervous, he said in a slightly hoarse voice, "My lord's meaning is?"

Zhou Tong shook his head, then said, "I don't mean anything. I just inadvertently thought about this matter."

The subordinate didn't dare respond.

"There are some matters which we temporarily cannot investigate clearly that we also do not need to care about." Zhou Tong withdrew his gaze from the window and said, "Why was Liang Xiaoxiao willing to strike a deal with that devil Black Robe, why did he prefer to commit suicide in an attempt to deal with Su Li and his daughter? Because he wanted revenge. That year, why did Su Li go to the Longevity Sect and kill so many people and then also run off to Xunyang City and go on a killing spree, causing the Liang Household's strength to greatly decrease? Because the southerners wanted to take advantage of my Great Zhou's internal chaos and invade the north, and so captured his wife to threaten him, making him go crazy. Why was the Great Zhou in such chaos? Because of that bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy. Thus they say that all things share a common origin. In the final analysis, all these matters were concerned with the problem of the position of Emperor of the Great Zhou. As long as we recognize this fact, there should be no mistakes on our side."

The subordinate said, "In the past five days, Prince Chen Liu visited the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education three times."

"Don't forget, although the Empress has no child of her own, Emperor Xian still has many sons and grandsons. Even if the Empress really did abdicate and turned the position of emperor over to the Chen Imperial clan, with Prince Chen Liu being so young, just what chance does he have? It's only natural that he's anxious."

"My lord's meaning is that Prince Chen Liu wants to win the Orthodoxy's support?"

"Mei Lisha is about to return to the sea of stars. He will not appear for this matter. As for striving to obtain the good impressions of the priests of the Li Palace, just how do you think he has been able to survive in the capital up to now, and moreover to live better and better as time passes?"

"Although you don't care about the position of emperor, everyone excluding you does. Consequently, I believe that the end of all these problems, or perhaps the source of all these problems, is precisely the position of emperor. Principal Shang's thoughts will also rest upon that throne."

After listening to Tang Thirty-Six's words, but before he began to ponder them, Chen Changsheng first paid notice to that name.

"Principal Shang...who is he?"

"Your teacher, Shang Xingzhou."

Chen Changsheng fell into a long silence.

This was the first time he had heard that name, and he had already lived together with this name's owner for fifteen years.

In recent times, he had many opportunities to learn this name, but he had never asked, no matter if it was to Mei Lisha or the Pope. This was because he did not want to know this name, because he did not want to, after learning that name, confront

those problems he did not want to think about. He also did not want other people to know that he did not know this name, because this fact made him somewhat sad.

Tang Thirty-Six could vaguely guess at his current mood. For some reason, he developed a bad impression of Chen Changsheng's teacher. He asked, "Did you ever think about why he accepted you as his disciple?"

Chen Changsheng was somewhat at a loss, asking, "Master picked me up by a river; is there a need for any other reason?"

Tang Thirty-Six stared into his eyes and said, "Your surname is Chen."

"So?" Chen Changsheng had no reaction.

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Could it be that you never thought...that you might be of the Imperial clan?"

Chen Changsheng was momentarily stunned, then shook his head. "No way, I floated down from one of the rivers originating from the Cloud Grave. My parents are probably descendants of some clan that had committed a crime in the past."

Tang Thirty-Six teased, "And just how old were you back then? You don't know a thing."

Chen Changsheng replied, "This is what Senior said. Senior has

never deceived someone, much less deceived me."

These words were said very definitely, and there was no hint of uncertainty in his clean eyes.

Tang Thirty-Six wanted to say something else, but when he saw those eyes, he somewhat restrained himself. He changed the subject, "What path are you prepared to walk next?"

When Chen Changsheng had arrived at the capital from Xining, he had originally thought his path to be crystal-clear. It was to find the secret to defying the heavens and changing fate, and thus escaping from the shadow of death. But now, he suddenly realized that before he could reach that point, he had to confront many different side paths.

"I don't know."

"You need someone to help you."

"Who can help me?"

"Me."

"Okay, then you can help me."

It was a very simple conversation, and confidence that made one feel very warm—this was because the two of them were both

youths.

Perhaps calm and mature, perhaps arrogant and frivolous, but they were all youths.

There were times when youths were so hot-blooded and naive that it exasperated others, but when compared to those elders that had endured many long years of tribulations, their lives were much simpler and the relationships between them would also be much simpler.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "No problem. First, we should understand all the factors behind this matter."

Chen Changsheng shook his head, saying, "First help me do one thing."

Tang Thirty-Six didn't feign any thought. Without any hesitation, he declared, "Speak, tell me this thing."

Chen Changsheng looked at him and said, "Can you first take a bath and brush your teeth?"

How did that saying go? 'I haven't even brushed my teeth...' In short, a somewhat irritated Tang Thirty-Six was pushed out of the library by Chen Changsheng and was washed sparkling clean with the aid of two large basins of hot water. After assuring that he didn't have a single speck of dirt from the Mausoleum of Books, he was allowed to change into a clean set of clothes. Afterwards, he

took a steamed bun that Xuanyuan Po had just finished making and walked to the lakeside.

Chen Changsheng placed Sir Xun Mei's notebook on the bookshelf and recorded it down, then went to wash Sir Xun Mei's bedding and Tang Thirty-Six's fur skin. It took him an entire hour to wash them clean, after which he hung them up on the great banyan tree. Hanging from the tree, they looked just like two swings.

The rain in the morning had long since ceased and the sun of the early summer shone over the lake. It didn't bring up too much mist from the lake and there was no feeling of stuffiness.

No more were the curses of Tianhai Ya'er. The Orthodox Academy was a picture of serene beauty.

Standing by the lake and gazing at the scenery on the other shore, Tang Thirty-Six said, "My grandfather once said that His Holiness is a good man, so you also shouldn't worry too much."

As he spoke, he absorbed himself in tearing the steamed bun in his hand to pieces.

The Pope was Chen Changsheng's martial uncle. Logically, he should be very happy to accept these words, but on his journey from the snowy plains to the south with Su Li, he had encountered far too many assassinations and plots. It was truly difficult for him to convince himself that the Pope really was a good man.

"Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke were most likely requested by His Holiness to go."

Chen Changsheng looked at the reflection of the blue sky and white clouds in the lake, which looked as if it had met with that perfect and seemingly unreal sky of the Green Leaf World. He shook his head. "How could a good man become the Pope?"

"This sort of way of viewing the world seems very mature, but it's actually very crude."

Tang Thirty-Six threw the torn-up pieces of the steamed bun into the lake and said, "His Holiness was never famous because of his intelligence. He was able to become the leader of the Orthodoxy because, in the past, he was very close with the Divine Empress. Of course, the most important factor is still because that old man's strength is unfathomable. Even your teacher Principal Shang ultimately lost to him."

Chen Changsheng said, "But...he wanted to kill Su Li."

"We've come back around again." Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and said teasingly, "I'm going to say something you're not going to like. In his life, Su Li has killed so many people, and countless people want him dead. Could it be that all those people are bad guys? In reality, in the eyes of those people, you protecting Su Li on his journey south makes you the real bad guy."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, is that really true?

"We first have to make clear for what purpose Principal Shang let you enter the capital."

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "You must know, my grandfather once said, the people that can truly make him feel afraid in this world number only three and a half. Your teacher is one of them."

Chen Changsheng's curiosity was piqued. He asked, "And the other people?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "The Empress, the Divination Elder, and also Black Robe."

Chen Changsheng counted up those powerful figures of the continent and asked in confusion, "What about the Demon Lord?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "The Demon Lord's not a human."

"Then that half a person...who is that?"

"Black Robe. Since he's devoted his life to the Demon race, it's only natural that he no longer be counted as human."

Chen Changsheng had seized upon the most vital point of this sentence. He questioned, "Does the Tang Old Master know Black Robe's true identity?"

Tang Thirty-Six did not answer this question.

Time gradually passed and the sun also gradually moved across the sky. The azure sky gradually turned red and twilight suffused the sky.

In the sky behind the great banyan tree, one could already see a smear of the coming night.

They stood by the lake, softly discussing these matters which they fundamentally had no interest in.

Back then in the Plum Garden Inn, Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six had their first meaningful conversation. At that time, they had both subconsciously wanted to seem more mature, to imitate the conversation and social intercourse of adults. But all this did was make them seem rather cute in an awkward and childish manner.

Now that they had finally touched upon these things, they abruptly realized that they didn't want to mature anymore.

Because maturing often indicated decay, indicated complexity and exhaustion.

Several dozen koi kicked their tails in the water. Because they had eaten their fill of steamed bun, they seemed lacking in strength. One of the fattest koi was even slowly sinking into the mud at the bottom of the pool.

The atmosphere of the lake was somewhat heavy.

"The world has always been very big and the minds of men have always been very complex. The dark times will always exceed the night, the uninteresting times will exceed the Heavenly Dao Academy, especially those old folks that rule this world. Their bodies exude the smell of dust from every pore." Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and said, "But those things aren't really important, because we aren't that sort of people."

Chen Changsheng gazed into the water at his reflection, examining his own face. Somewhat uneasy, he asked, "Did you ever think...in the future, we might change into that sort of abhorrent people."

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "That's every single person's own problem. Could it be that even if you turn into a pile of shit, you still have the face to blame the world?"

He continued, "You must understand, if we want to become a certain type of person, then our world will change to that type of world."

Chen Changsheng thought that these two sentences were exceedingly reasonable.

Before he departed from Xunyang City, Su Li had said some words to him. Only now did he completely understand them. Raising his head, he looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said, "Thank you!"

According to Tang Thirty-Six's character, he should have indifferently replied right now with a 'you're welcome', but for some reason, he didn't.

A refreshing night breeze blew across, slicing the golden ripples on the lake into countless pieces.

It was almost like he had returned to Xunyang City, on that long and stormy street with cracks in space everywhere, the edges of those cracks giving off a blinding light.

A metal blade was bared before the storm, absolutely unwavering.

"I want to become a person like Wang Po."

He said, "I want to live like he does."

Chapter 437 - Regardless If It's Autumn Wind Or Spring Wind, Let's Hit Some Trees

In this world, Chen Changsheng previously only had one idol, his senior brother Yu Ren. Later on, after experiencing that storm in Xunyang City, there was another: Wang Po. Golden light faintly glinted across the surface of the lake. He gazed at the koi in the water, especially that fat koi which was slowly sinking into the mud at the bottom. He thought to himself, I don't want to live like that. If I can live past this ordeal of life and death, if I can survive, then I would like to live like Wang Po.

He truly did admire Wang Po, and even somewhat worshiped him. Wang Po was at the head of the Proclamation of Liberation and was publicly acknowledged as the supreme expert of the middle generation. There were many people that worshiped him and worshipping him was a common sight. Logically, hearing Chen Changsheng's words, Tang Thirty-Six should have felt it was only right and proper. However, his expression was proof that he did not think this way, because he understood what sort of person Chen Changsheng was. When Chen Changsheng said he wanted to live like Wang Po, it assuredly was not like other worshippers who hoped to be as strong as Wang Po, but rather in other aspects.

Tang Thirty-Six thought that this was not good. Looking at Chen Changsheng, he said, "Don't be like Wang Po."

Chen Changsheng pulled his gaze away from the lake and turned to him in confusion. "Why?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Because becoming Wang Po is too bitter

and too difficult. In addition, it's too easy to become moving and tragic. No matter how we want to live, it's best to stay far away from the phrase 'moving and tragic'!"

Chen Changsheng said, "I'm very confused about what you mean."

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly said, "Do you know why he's called Wang Po of Tianliang?"

Snow-treading Xun Mei, Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, Unmoving Mountain Liang Wangsun, Famous Name Guan Bai—these experts at the forefront of the Proclamation of Liberation all had their own titles that circulated about the continent, and each of them had its own origin: some were their achievement, some were their ancestral home, and some were their eccentricity. Chen Changsheng had always believed that Wang Po was called Wang Po of Tianliang naturally because he came from Tianliang County. Only upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's question did he realize that it was for another reason.

Tang Thirty-Six said, "In those days, Tianliang County had four powerful families: Zhu, Liang, Chen, and Wang. Amongst them, the Liang clan and the Chen clan had in succession been Imperial clans, governing the entirety of the human world. The Zhu clan produced countless able experts, such as the current Solitary Drunk under the Moon, Zhu Luo. The Wang clan could stand together with these three other families because the Wang clan was extraordinarily wealthy. Many years ago, they could even be discussed on the same level as my clan."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then how did the Wang clan fall into decline?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "The problem is that the Wang clan had always supported the Liang clan, but in the end, the Chen clan replaced the Liang clan and claimed the Emperor's throne."

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng said, "It was just that simple?"

"A clan of a thousand generations is very much similar to an insect of a thousand legs. This is especially true of merchant clans, who always have many scattered investments. Naturally, it's impossible for a single lost gamble to cause the entire game to be lost. It's just that after the Chen clan rose up, the Wang clan would naturally be affected. The vast majority of the clan's property was lost in military expenditures, and the Liang clan declined quickly while the Zhu clan was getting ever closer, and could even be said to have had a much easier time." Tang Thirty-Six added, "In this period, the Zhu clan did many things that upset the Wang clan, so from that time onwards, there was a feud between the Zhu clan and Wang clan."

Chen Changsheng thought about the battle in Xunyang City as well as the words the Holy Maiden had said. He finally understood why the Holy Maiden said that Zhu Luo was selfish.

As there was a millennium-old feud between them, Zhu Luo was naturally unwilling to allow the destitute Wang clan to rise up again because of Wang Po's widespread fame in the world.

"Precisely as I said before, there were influential figures in the Wang clan and the Imperial clan that had always had good relations. Moreover, Taizu still remembered his former affection for the Wang clan, so he didn't let them their situation become too miserable. However, it was impossible for the Wang clan to imagine that this was the ultimate reason for their destruction."

"What do you mean?"

"At the time when Emperor Taizu was prepared to sort out the Wang clan, Chen Xuanba took up his sword and went to the palace, offering to serve as a guarantor for the Wang clan. In addition, the crown prince married a daughter of the Wang clan."

"Crown prince?"

"I'm talking about that real crown prince of course."

Chen Changsheng thought about that bloody storm that had occurred several hundred years ago, about that cruel story of the Hundred Herb Garden, and his body couldn't help but shiver. He thought to himself, since the Wang clan supported that crown prince, Emperor Taizong who succeeded to the throne naturally wouldn't be able to tolerate them.

"After that?"

"You should know the story after that. In that coup in the

Hundred Herb Garden, Emperor Taizong killed his own older brother. A little earlier, Zhou Dufu had killed his own little brother. Thus, the world finally obtained peace.”

As he said the word 'peace', Tang Thirty-Six's lips edged up, filled with an indescribable sense of derision.

Chen Changsheng was silent at these words. He whispered, "Are you saying...Chen Xuanba entering the Garden of Zhou, then dying in battle, was all part of Emperor Taizong's plan?"

"Or else?" Tang Thirty-Six looked at him said, "Emperor Taizong and Zhou Dufu were like brothers with different surnames, while Chen Xuanba was his own little brother. Why would the two fight each other?"

Chen Changsheng said, "They all say that once Chen Xuanba saw that the state was steady, he desired to pursue the supreme realm of the martial Dao. For this reason, he took the initiative to challenge Zhou Dufu."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "When the army of Tianliang County first entered the capital, the situation in the capital was one of general chaos. Even the demi-human hunters knew what Emperor Taizu's sons were up to. If the affairs of the clan were so disordered, how could the affairs of the state be stable? Chen Xuanba was the crown prince's most powerful military force, and he would actually choose that time to leave? Do you take that exceptional martial god of the past, the supreme expert of the Great Zhou Imperial clan of the past millennium, to be an idiot?"

Chen Changsheng said, "Perhaps...he just didn't want to kill his own relatives, so he decided to just walk away, thinking that what remains unseen is clean?"

Tang Thirty-Six gave a cold laugh, but said nothing more.

Chen Changsheng knew that this argument wasn't the least bit convincing. He couldn't help but feel a little disappointed and frustrated, and also feel a sort of indescribable sadness.

He lowered his head to gaze at the sword at his waist and felt that it had gotten a little hotter.

It wasn't blazing, only hot enough that his skin could feel it, or perhaps a feeling similar to one's eyes feeling a little hot.

It was an emotion of sorrowful melancholy.

The sword contained a sword soul, the sword soul of the Dragoncry Sword.

The Dragoncry Sword was Chen Xuanba's sword.

From a certain standpoint, he had a faint connection through this sword with that young martial god of the past.

The so-called sadness and melancholy originated from this.

"And the Wang clan?" he asked. "Chen Xuanba died, Taizu abdicated, and Emperor Taizong ascended the throne. How did he treat the Wang clan?"

"The sovereign wanted to deal with his disobedient subjects. How could he still need to personally deal with them?"

Tang Thirty-Six's expression was somewhat apathetic. "Three months after Emperor Taizong ascended the throne, the autumn wind began to blow. As he leaned on a railing and viewed the scenery, he very casually said a few words."

"What did he say?"

"The weather has gotten cold; let the Wang clan go bankrupt."

The lakeside was peaceful. The night gradually set in and it was somewhat chilly.

For a long time, Chen Changsheng said nothing.

He had originally been called Wang Po of Tianliang for this reason.

Emperor Taizong was a grand king with superb talent and bold vision. Whether it was his method or his abilities, he was in every aspect an expert rare to see in a thousand generations. But he did

not need to use any strategies or method. He only needed to casually say a few words, and countless people would naturally begin to carry out countless strategies to accomplish this task.

Chen Changsheng understood what Tang Thirty-Six had been saying before. Authority really was this world's most frightening thing.

The autumn wind began to blow and Emperor Taizong said a few words. As the autumn began to set in, the Wang clan was ruined.

No one knew how many heads fell to the ground, how many manors and fields were seized, and how many servants and maids were left destitute and homeless.

The Wang clan of Tianliang County faced their most terrifying period. Their situation was extremely miserable, and then as the years slowly passed, they faded until they were almost forgotten by the entire continent.

It was also at this time that the Wang clan produced a youth.

That youth was called Wang Ping. His talent in cultivation was exceptional, even being judged by the Divination Elder as an outstanding genius of the human world, second only to Su Li.

Perhaps it was in remembrance, or perhaps so that he could remember.

When that youth obtained the first rank of the Proclamation of Azure Sky, he changed his name to Wang Po.

Tianliang County's Wang Po. (天凉郡的王破)

The weather has gone cold, the Wang clan has gone bankrupt. (天凉王破)

"From the day he changed his name, the entire continent knew what he wanted to do."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "He wanted justice from the Great Zhou Imperial Court."

Brushed by the night wind, Chen Changsheng felt a little refreshed, but his face felt a little hot.

For a single person to ask for justice from the world, how grandiose that was.

"Could it be...the powerful figures of the capital didn't have any reaction to this?"

"At the time, Wang Po had already displayed the potential to enter the Divine Domain. Because of the oath of the Saints, even Zhu Luo couldn't move against him. Crucially...the Divine Empress had already come to power at the time. The Imperial clan was suppressed so heavily that they couldn't even breathe, much less have the energy to deal with him. Of course, Wang Po also faced

many dangers, so he went to Wenshui!"

"I heard from Senior Su Li about this. He said Wang Po worked in your clan for many years as an accountant."

"I've never met Wang Po, but I've heard many stories about him from my father."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Wang Po was always confused—how had his Wang clan which had been so well-off, after facing these clan-destroying difficulties, have no strength to retaliate, while the Tang clan had been able to survive up until now? Later on, after working for many years as an accountant, he finally understood. The reason that the Tang clan was able to survive was, firstly, that it wasn't part of any faction and never took part in any activity. Secondly, if it invested, the Tang clan was more willing to invest in those young people who were still not famous."

"Such as Senior Su Li?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at him, then said, "There's also you... didn't you say that my grandfather gifted you that umbrella?"

Chen Changsheng said, "It was wrested away from me by Senior Su Li."

Tang Thirty-Six could not refute this, so he no longer dwelled on it and continued, "After that bloody affair of the Orthodox Academy, the power of the Imperial clan was completely

suppressed by the Divine Empress and His Holiness. Zhu Luo also became very well-behaved, so Wang Po left our clan."

Chen Changsheng noted, "I know he went to the south."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Correct, in the span of ten-odd years, he bought half of Scholartree Manor and is already an expert."

Chen Changsheng fell into a long silence.

After listening to Wang Po's story, he realized that Tang Thirty-Six was right.

To become a person like Wang Po, to live as he did, truly was very difficult.

"My grandfather said that Wang Po lives too miserably."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and earnestly said, "I don't want you to live as miserably as him in the future."

Chen Changsheng asked, "So just how should we live?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "We are young, so we should live like young people do. Just like how when I came to the capital and learned of all of Tianhai Ya'er's repulsive deeds, I wanted to cripple him. This morning when I saw his idiotic self sitting on his wheelchair in front of the academy, I wanted to give him a good

kick, so I kicked him! If you want be hot-blooded, to act on impulse, just do it! What else? If you don't like it, then fight!"

From the other side of the lake, there was a sudden muffled bang.

The two looked over and saw in the gloomy darkness that Xuanyuan Po was continuously hitting a tree.

Tang Thirty-Six roared with laughter. "You see, if you have the energy, you have to use it. If you have the strength, you have to apply it. When you're young, why shouldn't you be frivolous, doing whatever takes your fancy?"

Chen Changsheng also began to laugh.

Chapter 438 - Principal Chen Who Wants To Get Involved In Everything

"Youths should be frivolous...I suddenly feel that there's a person rather similar to you," Chen Changsheng said.

Tang Thirty-Six asked him inquisitively, "Who?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "Su Li."

Tang Thirty-Six gave a radiant smile. "Grandfather said that I really am like him when he was young."

These two people that were talking with each other didn't know that outside Xunyang City, the Holy Maiden of the South had once said something similar to Su Li. Su Li was very wild, and Tang Thirty-Six was also very wild, but there were a few subtle differences between them. For instance, the wildness of Tang Thirty-Six was obviously much fresher and new.

As a young genius with such an outstanding background, Tang Thirty-Six's arrival at the capital from Wenshui attracted countless gazes. He became a valued student of the Heavenly Dao Academy, but at the Ivy Festival, he actually entered the Orthodox Academy that had been in ruins for so many years.

No one had imagined that the Orthodox Academy would so quickly obtain a new student, thus shocking the entire capital. But in the eyes of the common folk of the capital, the people that truly

allowed the Orthodox Academy to slowly regain its famous reputation were that Chen Changsheng who had an engagement with Xu Yourong and the Princess Luoluo with her incomparably respected status. In both the Ivy Festival and the Grand Examination, their brilliance was dazzling beyond compare. The wolf youth, as a person who stood at the margins of the Orthodox Academy, was also extremely remarkable. By contrast, Tang Thirty-Six was actually rather ordinary.

And yet, just as many people thought that Tang Thirty-Six would gradually sink into silence in the Orthodox Academy and become an ordinary student, just as those young cultivators that had succeeded in breaking into Ethereal Opening in the Mausoleum of Books entered the Garden of Zhou to refine themselves, Tang Thirty-Six suddenly exploded.

He continued to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao in the Mausoleum of Books, renouncing his life of luxury. He no longer had the appearance of loving comfort and hating work. He ate Guan Feibai's unpalatable meals of salted fish and raw vegetables, slept in his clothes, and began cultivating as soon as he woke up. In the short time period of a few months, he actually managed to successively break through two thresholds!

Right now, he was already at the upper level of Ethereal Opening. Looking as far as the eye can see, in the several hundred years after Su Li roared across the horizon, besides him and Wang Po and those other experts that had long since shocked the world, who had reached the upper level of Ethereal Opening at as young an age as Tang Thirty-Six? If it weren't for Qiushan Jun, Xu Yourong, and Chen Changsheng being far too freakish, what he had done would truly have been able to shock the world.

Just as the Old Master of the Tang clan had said, his sole grandson truly was very similar to Su Li. Then if this Tang Thirty-Six that was very much like Su Li were to walk out of the Orthodox Academy on the morning of the next day and once again see Zhou Ziheng, he would naturally not have a very good complexion.

"According to the rules of the Orthodoxy pertaining to the All-School Martial Exhibition, today is the final day for the Orthodox Academy to give a reply."

Zhou Ziheng looked at him and said, "We are all cultivators, and the future enemy for all of us will be the demons. There are many problems that can only be solved with the sword or spear. Could it be that you really think that as long as the gate to the Orthodox Academy is shut, the storms on the outside can't get in?"

There was no rain this morning. The wheelchair-bound Tianhai Ya'er who had been coming by the past few days did not appear, perhaps because the kick Tang Thirty-Six had dealt against him yesterday had been too savage. Only Zhou Ziheng stood in front of the gate.

People were like their names, and Zhou Ziheng was innately a very arrogant person. It was because he was a Star Condensation expert, his talent in cultivation was excellent, he was a teacher at the Temple Seminary and also a priest of the Hall of Subjugation. Even more importantly, he was an honored guest of the Tianhai clan.

With these three identities, he couldn't find a single reason to not be proud. Of course, he was keenly aware that his representing the Temple Seminary in challenging the Orthodox Academy was truly a loss to his identity as an expert. This was clearly the big bullying the small and was rather shameful. However, it was for precisely this reason that he appeared even more arrogant—it was like he could only be without a guilty conscience if he completely crushed the Orthodox Academy beneath his feet.

Tang Thirty-Six had to look into this person's two eyes before he recognized who it was.

Yesterday, Zhou Ziheng had blocked his path. He did not think that today this person would once again block his path.

Yesterday, he had been returning to the Orthodox Academy. Today, he wanted to go out of Hundred Flowers Lane and again buy some soy milk and youtiao. He didn't like to eat the breakfast that Xuanyuan Po made. Even if it was the best porridge, with Chen Changsheng forbidding him from adding sugar or even eating it with a few salted vegetables, just how could it taste good?

He was already angry from getting up from bed, and then he was prevented from eating breakfast as he liked. Tang Thirty-Six would naturally not treat Zhou Ziheng with much manners.

"Hey, idiot, move aside," Tang Thirty-Six said to him.

Yesterday it was these four words, and today was the same.

Zhou Ziheng was enraged yesterday, and he was even more so today. His right hand once again gripped the hilt of the sword at his waist. Still like yesterday, a yawn arose from that inn on the street, the priests encircled him, and the soldiers raised up the divine crossbows in their hands.

The area in front of the gate to the Orthodox Academy was in disorder, but the source of this disorder, Tang Thirty-Six, had no reaction. He directly began to walk out of the street.

For him, the soy milk and youtiao sold in that old store were far more important than this person called Zhou Ziheng.

"There's no school out there that can be run by closing its doors."

Zhou Ziheng looked at his back and said in a cold voice, "No matter how deep Chen Changsheng's and your backgrounds are, if you really plan to continue delaying, then that will only serve to ultimately make the Orthodox Academy a joke in the capital!"

Tang Thirty-Six ceased walking and turned his head. "Just what is it you want to tell me?"

Zhou Ziheng's expression suddenly grew apprehensive. Thinking of what he had experienced yesterday, he knew that this youth relied on his status as the sole grandson of the Tang Old Master. His behavior was unbridled and fearless. From those slightly raised eyebrows of his, Zhou Ziheng could guess that this youth was going to shamelessly start messing around again.

"There's no need for me to speak to you."

He looked at Tang Thirty-Six and expressionlessly said, "I want to speak to Chen Changsheng."

"As it turns out, you also know that Chen Changsheng is the Principal of the Orthodox Academy." Tang Thirty-Six looked back at him and said, "Then what sort of identity, what sort of status, does a little asshole like you have that you can meet Principal Chen whenever you want?"

Only then did Zhou Ziheng realize that even if he took those three identities which made him so arrogant and added them together, they still wouldn't be enough for him to have the slightest qualification to request an interview with Chen Changsheng. On the contrary, solely based on the fact that he had directly addressed Chen Changsheng by name, the Orthodox Academy had ample justification to request that the Hall of Subjugation punish him for his crime.

With this thought, his face became somewhat ugly.

Just at this moment, the gate to the Orthodox Academy was pushed open from within. Xuanyuan Po's voice rang out like a bell, "You're just buying some soy milk and youtiao, why are you taking so long? Hurry up! Or else Chen Changsheng is going to notice and lecture us again."

Tang Thirty-Six said irritably, "I'm using my own money to buy it, it's none of his business."

Xuanyuan Po somewhat anxiously waved his hand, "The soy milk is whatever, what's important is the youtiao..."

"Youtiao is very tasty, but it's fried in oil. It's not good for your health." Chen Changsheng had arrived faster than they had imagined. Walking out of the gate, he gazed at Xuanyuan Po and said, "Drag Tang Tang back and then go buy something else."

Tang Thirty-Six was furious at these words. "I just want to eat youtiao! You really are acting like a principal! Getting involved in everything!"

"Didn't you already eat it yesterday?"

Chen Changsheng was prepared to continue his exhortation when he suddenly espied Zhou Ziheng and unconsciously stopped.

Zhou Ziheng looked at him and said, "My Temple Seminary..."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I have time tomorrow. May the Temple Seminary please choose a place."

The area in front of the Orthodox Academy was deathly still.

Zhou Ziheng thought he had misheard, asking, "What did you say?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "I, as representative of the Orthodox Academy, accept your challenge."

The crowd that have come over the past few days to catch the fun suddenly scattered apart with a rush.

Ten-odd people rushed off to the big streets and small alleys of the capital.

In not much time, the entire capital knew of what had occurred this morning.

The Orthodox Academy had accepted the Temple Seminary's challenge.

Chapter 439 - Eating, Drinking, Whoring, Gambling; Being Born, Growing Old, Getting Sick, And Dying

Zhou Ziheng stood at his original position, still not quite recognizing what had just occurred.

He had originally believed that the Orthodox Academy would act as it had in the preceding days, thinking of ways to delay and then going off to think of ways to confront this challenge—for example, the Orthodox Academy could possibly invite Princess Luoluo to come out of the Li Palace. If that were the case, then his only choices were naturally to concede or avoid the battle. However, the Tianhai clan had prepared a contingency plan for this. If the Orthodox Academy really did have Princess Luoluo appear, then the Tianhai clan would certainly use this as a pretext to stir up even greater winds and waves. But he had never expected Chen Changsheng to actually agree.

After a moment, he was finally able to awake from his stupor. He looked at Chen Changsheng with a grave expression and asked, "Who will battle for the Orthodox Academy?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Me."

As he said the word 'me', there was no pause and naturally no pretense of thought. It seemed simply to be a matter of course.

Yes, he was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. When the

Orthodox Academy was challenged, it was only right that he face it.

Zhou Ziheng suddenly realized that the current Chen Changsheng, when compared to the Chen Changsheng of the past few days, was somewhat different. But he couldn't quite tell just where he was different.

"Very good." He looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "Since the time has been decided, is any place fine?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "According to the regulation in the proposal set forth by the two archbishops of the Sacred Halls, since the time was set by the Orthodox Academy, the location is naturally for the Temple Seminary to decide."

Zhou Ziheng turned his gaze to the dense crowd outside Hundred Flowers Lane and then said emotionlessly, "Since there are already so many people, we might as well just do it here."

Chen Changsheng nodded his head to indicate he had no objection. He shifted his gaze to Tang Thirty-Six, who had at some point gone and bought soy milk and youtiao. Shaking his head helplessly, Chen Changsheng asked, "Is eating and drinking so important?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Eating and drinking isn't life or death, it's above life and death."

The gate to the Orthodox Academy closed once more, but this separation was different from that of the last few days. Everyone knew that tomorrow this tightly closed gate would open once more!

The crowd outside the Hundred Flowers Lane was in a continuous uproar, and consequently, the entire capital turned into an uproar.

The Temple Seminary had challenged the Orthodox Academy. This was about to be the first battle held in the All-School Martial Exhibition.

It had nothing to do with the far-reaching intention of the Orthodoxy's new rule to help the humans resist the demons. All the people knew that this challenge signified that the Tianhai clan and the new faction within the Orthodoxy were finally beginning to make themselves heard to the Li Palace.

It didn't take long before this news was spread throughout the capital. Many workmen quickly arrived on the scene with all sorts of construction materials, and in a brief moment, a simple awning began to take shape. Soon after, several dozen carriages made their way to Hundred Flowers Lane and from these carriages emerged many people. Some were painters, some were storytellers, and some were merchants. There were also experts that were honored guests of the Four Great Markets.

Yes, these people that had reacted even faster than the aristocracy of the capital were all from the famed Four Great Markets of the capital.

The Four Great Markets were involved in every business: eateries, restaurants, brothels, foodstuffs, luxury goods, textiles. But the business that brought in the most money had always been gambling.

The annual Grand Examination was often the time when the Four Great Markets made the most money. It was out of the question for them to pass on this All-School Martial Exhibition that was naturally meant for betting on. In fact, there were many people that suspected that, for the Li Palace to so swiftly disregard the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education's objections and pass the proposal of the two Sacred Hall archbishops, the masters of the Four Great Markets must have been pushing it behind the scenes.

Of course, although the area outside Hundred Flowers Lane was now bustling beyond compare, the people of the Four Great Markets did not dare to disturb the tranquility of the Orthodox Academy. Business people were still business people.

What occurred soon after somewhat surpassed people's expectations.

A steward of the Heavenly Fragrance Market, completely ignoring the vigilant stares of the Li Palace priests and imperial guards, slowly made his way up to the gate of the Orthodox Academy. Seeing this scene, the crowd was very much puzzled and perplexed. Just what was this steward up to? It must be known that the Heavenly Fragrance Market was the weakest of the Four Great Markets, always ranking last. The sudden emergence of a dark horse in this year's Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng's

inconceivable feat of taking first rank of the first banner, had inflicted disastrous losses on the Heavenly Fragrance Market, so much so that there were even rumors that the Heavenly Fragrance Market had changed owners. Just where did this steward's confidence come from?

Something happened which took the crowd even more by surprise. The gate of the Orthodox Academy actually opened and that steward walked inside.

"You're saying...the Heavenly Fragrance Market is your Tang clan's property?"

Chen Changsheng looked at that incomparably reverential steward in front of Tang Thirty-Six and said in shock, "Why haven't I ever heard about this?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "It was only done after the Grand Examination."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I heard that the backing of each of the Four Great Markets is extremely deep. It seems that the Pavilion of Divination might even own some. Why would the Heavenly Fragrance Market's previous master be willing to sell!"

Everyone knew that the Wenshui Tangs were the world's wealthiest clan. The problem was that the relationship between the Tianhai clan and the Tang clan was somewhat of a wreck. In the past few years, the Tianhai clan had been incessantly working in the dark to prevent the Tang clan's influence from spreading

into the capital. If the Heavenly Fragrance Market really did belong to the Tang clan, then the efforts of the Tianhai clan had all been for nothing. For this reason, he was rather perplexed at how the Tang clan had managed to accomplish this task.

Tang Thirty-Six chuckled, but didn't explain.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat lost in the dark.

The steward gave Chen Changsheng a rather peculiar look. He thought to himself, if the Wenshui Tangs had not placed such a large stake on Sir, how could the Heavenly Fragrance Market have lost so much that it would be forced to sell? Of course, he didn't dare to say this out loud. Turning deferentially towards Tang Thirty-Six, he said, "Young master, according to the laws of the clan, the money within the market cannot be moved. I could only take Master's own silver currently being stored with us and bet it all."

Tang Thirty-Six did some mental calculations, then thought to himself, even if I won, it won't be enough to buy Clear Lake Restaurant. Turning to Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po, he said, "How much money do you guys have? Give it all to me."

When he borrowed money from others, it was only natural that he not write any sort of IOU. As for what he was borrowing money for, he was also too lazy to explain. When he borrowed money from someone, it showed his high regard for that person.

Most regretfully, these two schoolmates of his in the Orthodox

Academy were so lacking in this aspect that it really made one look down on them.

Xuanyuan Po rummaged all throughout his luggage and found around seventy taels of silver.

Chen Changsheng was even more miserable. After searching all over, he couldn't even produce a single piece of paper.

Tang Thirty-Six was very sympathetic to Xuanyuan Po, but he was extremely angry towards Chen Changsheng. "What about those silver ingots I gave you? And the treasures Princess Luoluo gave you? After the Grand Examination, the Orthodox Academy took in so many presents; where did all those things run off to?"

Chen Changsheng said awkwardly, "Those things...they were all lost in the Garden of Zhou."

Tang Thirty-Six was keenly aware of just what assets Chen Changsheng possessed before entering the Garden of Zhou. Let alone the box of silver ingots, the treasures Luoluo had gifted were to be envied. In the end...they had all been lost in the Garden of Zhou that was already destroyed. There was no hope of finding those assets again and he felt a deep grief in his heart. He said to Chen Changsheng in vexation, "Truly a guy that could cause his family to go bankrupt."

As Chen Changsheng thought of those boxes and books in the depths of that lake in the Garden of Zhou, he also was filled with regret. He thought that it would be best to think of a way to bring

those things back. In the past two day, he had attempted several more times, but after his spiritual sense crossed through the ocean of sword intent, it was still incapable of entering the illusion of the black monolith. To rediscover the path to the Garden of Zhou was seemingly destined to be a long and endless journey.

Xuanyuan Po suddenly thought of a problem. Glancing at that Heavenly Fragrance Market steward who was checking over the silver, he asked Tang Thirty-Six, "You want to take the money to bet?"

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What else? Take it to a brothel?"

Xuanyuan Po shook his head, "It's said in my tribe, humans are the most deceitful, you can't bet with them. It'd be better if I just kept the money and used it as a little capital to start a business."

As he spoke, he prepared to take back his silver tael.

"You really are a dumb bear." Tang Thirty-Six was not in a pleasant mood. "In only two days' time, you can turn one silver tael into eleven. Just what business can generate more profit than that?"

Xuanyuan Po paused, and asked in some disbelief, "What pays out that much?"

Demi-humans didn't like to gamble with humans, but that didn't mean they didn't like to gamble. Even the most honest bear youth

at least understood the concept of odds.

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "The Four Great Markets just calculated the odds. The highest odds are one-to-eleven, the lowest is still one-to-nine."

Xuanyuan Po suddenly felt that something wasn't quite right. He asked uncertainly, "This is for us winning?"

Tang Thirty-Six looked back like he was gazing at an idiot. "Zhou Ziheng is in the Star Condensation Realm, Chen Changsheng is in the Ethereal Opening Realm. Do you think the Four Great Markets would give Zhou Ziheng odds of one-to-eleven?"

Xuanyuan Po was stunned, and then sighed, "You actually want to use my money to bet on Chen Changsheng!"

It must be known that these taels of silver, other than the part that was the allowance provided by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, were silver he had bitterly earned through washing dishes in the night market. He was very unwilling to let all this money be thrown away.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered at him, "You have to understand, he used his identity as Principal to give you shoes to wear, so if he were to complain about you to Princess Luoluo, what would happen to you?"

Xuanyuan Po was helpless at these words and felt very pained.

The plum blossoms filling the room were still blooming. It was as if the four seasons really were within these simple walls.

Regretfully, it was impossible for the life of humans to be as beautiful and magical as this scene. Once they reached the stern winter, it was no longer possible to return to the spring.

Mei Lisha's illness was severe. The matters of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had all been handed over to his subordinates to handle, while some of the matters had been given over to Mao Qiuyu.

In fact, he knew very well that he wasn't ill, just old.

If it were an illness, it could be treated, especially since the patient was him. As long as he wished it, every teacher and student of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green would come over and use the Sacred Light technique.

No one could treat old age. The Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green could not, the Holy Maiden could not, and the Pope also could not.

As one grew old and was on the verge of returning to the sea of stars, different people would display different attitudes.

Mei Lisha had spent his time in the Orthodoxy studying ancient scriptures and managing the educational bureaucracy. He had lived a solitary life for several hundred years, so at this time, what he loved the most was excitement.

Especially excitement that involved Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy.

After hearing Priest Xin's narrative of what had happened this morning, Mei Lisha laughed as the wrinkles on his face smoothed. "Ah, truly exciting."

As he said the word 'exciting', his elderly face was full of smiles. Even those liver spots on his face seemed to fade away somewhat, and yet Priest Xin heard loneliness in that voice.

This made him feel extremely uneasy.

Chapter 440 - Be Optimistic About That Plum Blossom For Many Years

Priest Xin suddenly realized that the plum blossoms filling the room were exuding a chilly air, even though most plum blossoms loved the cold. In order to drive away this chill, he barely managed to muster a smile and continue narrating the excitement surrounding the Orthodox Academy. He particularly took care to describe how after Chen Changsheng had received the challenge for the Orthodox Academy, the Four Great Markets had reacted quickly and erected an awning at the entrance to Hundred Flowers Lane. Moreover, the Four Great Markets were at this very moment collecting silver for betting stakes.

"It seems that there aren't as many people betting as during the Grand Examination." Mei Lisha smiled as he spoke.

Priest Xin didn't understand. Even though this battle between Zhou Ziheng and Chen Changsheng had naturally attracted the gazes of many, just how could it be discussed on the same level as the Grand Examination? In the next moment, he finally remembered something. During the Grand Examination, when nobody else was optimistic about Chen Changsheng, he had bet all his property on Chen Changsheng—because the archbishop was optimistic about Chen Changsheng.

"I understand." He smiled at the archbishop and said, "In a while, I'll have someone help me put down a bet."

All of the Li Palace knew that after setting the Orthodox Academy on the road to recovery, Priest Xin had become Archbishop Mei

Lisha's trusted aide. His attitude was the archbishop's attitude. In this year's Grand Examination, when Priest Xin bet all his property on Chen Changsheng, every priest of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, out of fear of being seen as unsupportive of Chen Changsheng, also bet huge sums of money on Chen Changsheng.

This was an enormous amount of silver.

The Heavenly Fragrance Market's final loss had been so miserable because, apart from the unyielding and callous assault of the Wenshui Tangs, it had to pay out the winnings for all these Li Palace priests.

Hearing Priest Xin's words, Mei Lisha began to laugh, and then he began to cough. The room resonated with the painful sounds of coughing. After a long time, they stopped. After tiredly gasping for breath, Mei Lisha gazed outside the window at the day and sorrowfully said, "I had originally wanted to see just how much Chen Changsheng had progressed. Sadly, it seems that I won't be able to see it."

For Chen Changsheng, tomorrow was the first time after the Grand Examination that he would formally display his power and cultivation. Viewing the monoliths in the Mausoleum of Books, holding up the sky in the Garden of Zhou, carrying Su Li on his back and escaping from the snowy plains of the land of the demons, returning south...all the things he had learned and comprehended over these days would be displayed tomorrow.

He was about to give a full report and exhibition of the gains he had made to those people that were concerned about him.

Tomorrow would be a brand new day for him.

However, to Mei Lisha, there would be no tomorrow.

Priest Xin suddenly felt his legs grow soft. With great difficulty, he drew closer and gazed at the calm expression on the archbishop's face, but his nerves prevented him from saying anything. The entire Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education quickly became immersed in a nervous atmosphere and a piece of news was sent to every corner of the capital.

The bloodstains from the past year had long since vanished from the plaza of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, but that row of maple trees were as red as blood, as if the harsh and somber autumn had come early. As it turned out, it was the coming of twilight.

Whichever interpretation it was, in the end, they were both ominous, evoking melancholy in others.

Since the autumn had already come, could the deathly stillness of winter be far away?

With the coming of twilight, wasn't the night right before the eyes?

As the night descended and the lanterns were being lit, Chen Changsheng quickly made his way over to the Bureau of

Ecclesiastic Education. Ignoring the salutations of the priests, he directly proceeded to that room in the very back.

The room was still filled with plum blossoms, but many of the plum blossoms were no longer so flourishing. Signs of wilting could already be seen.

"I am going to die." Mei Lisha gazed at him, his voice so gentle that it seemed like he was afraid of scaring a small child.

Chen Changsheng had pondered over life and death countless times and had many times believed that he could already see past it, like that time when he was facing the Black Dragon, or that time in the Garden of Zhou. He even believed that he struck up some of the real meanings of life, like how those who said they were the most afraid of death would often be the people least afraid of death, or like how there were many times in life where only by not being afraid of death could one evade death, that only by putting one's life on the line could one continue to live.

But now as he stared at the elderly archbishop, he suddenly realized that those thoughts of his were still not complete, because he had never thought, if one had no enemies, or if one's enemy was time, then how could one battle against it? When death comes, how could one maintain their calm? He did not know, so he did not know what to say at this time.

Mei Lisha looked at him and chuckled. Not continuing on this topic, he asked, "What do you believe your chances of success to be tomorrow?"

Perhaps because death was on the verge of arrival and time was too short, the archbishop today spoke very straightforwardly.

Chen Changsheng was also very straightforward. Without the slightest hesitation, he said, "One hundred percent."

Mei Lisha thought that he was just soothing him. Laughing, he said, "I believe that you've actually thought about it many times, why I've been so good to you."

Chen Changsheng said nothing. Of course, he had thought about this many times, but he had never found an answer. He knew it assuredly had to do with some very big matter, but he didn't want to think in that direction.

"I have hidden some things from you and even deceived you, but you must believe in me, believe in His Holiness, and believe in your teacher."

Mei Lisha continued, "Maybe there will be many things where the true appearance is different from the outward one, but that's only walking a different path. The ultimate destination has never changed. Just like all that we have planned for you. In the future, there may be a time where you feel resentful, even angry, but you must see what the final outcome is. I believe that no matter what, it will not be of harm to you."

Chen Changsheng didn't quite understand the meaning of these words, but he understood the archbishop's meaning—these two

meanings were different. As long as the result was good, the process and methods used to reach it were not too important. Mei Lisha wanted to say precisely this. But was he talking about the mind or talking about actions? As Chen Changsheng gazed at Mei Lisha's aged face, he no longer wanted to think about these questions. He believed that to an elder that was about to depart from this world, to continue questioning was an exceptionally cruel act. In addition, he could feel that this elder was sincerely thinking about his well-being.

In everyone's view, in both the Ivy Festival and the Grand Examination, the reason that Chen Changsheng was able to obtain the final victory and his name was able to shake the capital, the person he and the Orthodox Academy had to thank the most, was precisely Archbishop Mei Lisha. Prior to the Pope personally crowning Chen Changsheng with the crown of thorns, Mei Lisha had been his sole supporter in the world, the patron of the Orthodox Academy. It was only natural that he was very close to Chen Changsheng. Only Chen Changsheng himself clearly understood that, in fact, he and Mei Lisha had only met each other a few times. Coming from Xining to the capital, everything had happened too quickly, time had flowed by too fast. Without any warning, he and the Orthodox Academy had come to this day, and the archbishop was going to die.

Their meetings had been few and, given they were separated by several hundred years of existence, it was naturally impossible to say that they were good friends; yet he could feel Archbishop Mei Lisha's heartfelt goodwill towards him, and even a great...pity, as if Mei Lisha knew his greatest secret, causing his eyes to always be filled with apology. Every emotion was mutual. As Chen Changsheng gazed at him on the verge of death, Chen Changsheng did not know what he could help with. He felt rather useless and

deeply apologetic, so much so that his eyes began to grow moist.

Mei Lisha allowed Chen Changsheng to depart. He had Priest Xin come into the room and take a book off the bookshelf.

In the final moments of his life, he was still reading. It was a Daoist scripture with a rather old cover.

He read it for a very long time, then closed the book and gazed out the window at the darkness. He mumbled, "Principal Shang truly is an extraordinary man."

Priest Xin didn't comprehend why the archbishop, at this time, would mention that once-principal of the Orthodox Academy, even though he had just met Chen Changsheng who had been that man's student.

"Interesting." Mei Lisha's dried-up and thin finger tapped twice against the book, and then he said, "I'm very curious about just how the next Pope's life will be recorded in the Daoist Canon."

Priest Xin didn't understand, not expecting that the archbishop would be concerned about the great matters of the Orthodoxy that would occur after his death. He asked, "Who does Your Eminence believe will win the match tomorrow?"

This was changing the subject, but he was also truly interested. It had nothing to do with all his property, only that he really didn't understand.

During the Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng's victory could be described as a miracle.

He broke into Ethereal Opening in the middle of the match, and then he used the final move of the Mount Li Sword Style to compel Gou Hanshi to concede the battle. Only this way was he able to obtain first rank of the first banner.

Tomorrow's opponent was Zhou Ziheng, a person in the Star Condensation Realm. He couldn't repeat the scene of the Grand Examination and break into Star Condensation in the middle of the match. A miracle by definition was extremely rare to see. If a miracle were to occur twice in the short span of a year, then that was no longer called a miracle. It was called impossible. No matter how Priest Xin looked at it, he couldn't make out whether or not Chen Changsheng truly believed he had a chance at defeating Zhou Ziheng. He wished to know if the archbishop really believed Chen Changsheng could win or if he was just hoping, in the final moments of his life, to inspire a little confidence in that youth, to escort him for a little while more.

The petals gradually wilted and dropped off, but the branches of the plum blossoms remained firm and upright. Even if they were twisted, even if the temperature in the room suddenly dropped and it became bitterly cold, they still did not show the slightest sign of snapping.

Mei Lisha gazed at the plum blossom on the table and smiled. "I am still optimistic about Chen Changsheng."

Chen Changsheng sat in the great hall of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, Luoluo at his side. She said nothing, only holding his hand. Priests stood off in the distance, not coming up to disturb them. Some people like Zhou Ziheng sometimes forgot about the fact that this youth was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, but these people could never forget this. Moreover, the mood was somewhat oppressive.

After a while, Chen Changsheng raised his head and realized that the hall was abnormally silent. Those priests had vanished off somewhere.

An old man dressed in a hempen robe quietly stood in the great hall in front of that mural on the wall. It was the Pope.

That mural was massive, but it was only a drawing of a plum blossom.

The fragrance of the plum blossom arose from the bitter winter. Whether it was the Orthodoxy or the South Stream Temple or the Mount Li Sword Sect, when teaching the next generation, they all carried on this way of thinking.

Chen Changsheng rose up and walked over. After bowing respectfully, he asked a question which had perplexed him for many days.

Maybe because tonight was particularly special, or maybe because Mei Lisha had spoken so directly to him, the question he asked was also very straightforward.

"Why did Your Holiness suddenly change your view?"

The view was naturally indicating the Pope's view of the Divine Empress, of the Imperial clan, of the world.

Chen Changsheng gazed into the depths of the great hall and said, "It naturally can't be because of me, and I also think that it shouldn't be because of him."

Chapter 441 - The Bell Rings Out The Call To Return Home

The great hall of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education was very quiet. Luoluo remained seated, not coming over.

The Pope calmly gazed at Chen Changsheng, saying, "It is my view of the world, so it can only change because of the world."

Chen Changsheng contemplated this, then said, "I still don't understand."

The Pope calmly replied, "You do not need to understand...old people like us have experienced too many storms, seen too many sunrises and sunsets. We have already become numb to many things. Often we regard the ways of the world as vapid and dull. We do not mind using a few methods that are not so beautiful, and even do some things that go against our own convictions. However, in many cases, we do things this way not because we want to protect something or the other, but because we clearly understand where our responsibilities lie."

"Responsibility?" Chen Changsheng asked.

"Yes, the longer you live, the greater your responsibility," the Pope replied. "The responsibility we have towards this world only gets heavier and heavier as time passes by. We have a responsibility to seek an even better future for humanity. For this, we can bear any bad reputation, disregard any price. Back then, I became an enemy of your teacher. Now, I have become an enemy

of the Empress. Both were for this reason."

Saying this, the Pope walked into the depths of the great hall and then did not emerge again.

Chen Changsheng and Luoluo walked out of the great hall, walked down the stone steps, and came to the row of maple trees in front of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

The maple trees in spring were green, but in the twilight, they were the red color of blood. Now in the night, they had become black.

Originally, all colors were painted by the heavens and the earth.

After not too much time had passed, the heavy ringing of a bell rose up from the hall.

A bell also rang out from the Li Palace.

The bell rang out. It was the call to return home.

The scriptures of the Orthodoxy had always held that the death of a person was not like the extinguishing of a lantern. The soul would not stay on this world but would return to the sea of stars.

Amongst the ocean of stars in the night sky was the Divine Kingdom, Heaven; this was the true eternal homeland.

In the instant the bell rang, Archbishop Mei Lisha's soul calmly departed the human world, his divine soul silently returning to the sea of stars.

There was no conspiracy and also no grand and magnificent conclusion, only a calm and ordinary departure in compliance with the rules of life, just like many ordinary old people.

But, in the end, he was no ordinary old man. He was the eldest member of the Orthodoxy, an Archbishop of the Sacred Halls that held the highest status.

He had seen three Popes appointed and four generations of Holy Maidens. He had seen Emperor Taizong, he had seen Zhou Dufu, he had seen Chen Xuanba, and he had seen Wang Zhice. He had witnessed life and death in the Hundred Herb Garden, witnessed blood and fire rage through the Orthodox Academy. He had seen countless years and knew countless secrets. As he departed, those years and secrets were buried together.

Hearing the ringing of the bell, Chen Changsheng raised his head to gaze at the starry sky, the windblown leaves sometimes obscuring and sometimes cutting off the night sky.

He did not know which star was the archbishop's Fated Star, much less see it, but he knew that the star was most likely growing dim at this very moment.

If death really was the soul returning to the sea of stars, why

would that star grow dim?

The bell continued to ring and carriages arrived in a constant stream from various places in the capital. Powerful figures, one by one, came to the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and came forward to personally offer their condolences. Chen Changsheng stood amongst the trees and watched this scene, saying nothing. He saw the head of the Tianhai clan, saw Xue Xingchuan, saw Mo Yu, saw Prince Chen Liu who was forcefully suppressing his tears, and he saw Xu Shiji.

He did not want to meet with these people. With Luoluo leading him by the hand, they crossed through the trees and came to a relatively lonely main street. Together, they returned to the Orthodox Academy.

This was the first time in a very long time that Luoluo stayed the night at the Orthodox Academy. Jin Yulu followed them all the way. Knowing that tonight's circumstances were special, he did not say anything.

Chen Changsheng brought her directly to the lakeshore. They climbed up the great banyan tree and then sat side by side, gazing up at the countless stars in the sky above and the lake below as he softly spoke to her.

He spoke of many matters, concerning Xining Village, concerning the Garden of Zhou, concerning the many things he believed to be sinister, bloody and cruel on his journey south. Tonight he told her everything he had not told her last time.

Luoluo quietly listened, not saying anything.

"Maturing is a very challenging thing. Because it's difficult to grasp the conditions within, once a fruit has matured, it's very easy for it to rot."

Chen Changsheng continued, "I still persistently believe that life should not be a battle."

With these words, he let Luoluo go to sleep while he remained seated on the great banyan tree, contemplating a few matters.

Su Li had taught him three swords. The Intellectual Sword was very powerful, involving every sort of calculation and deduction. That was a battle. The Blazing Sword was very powerful, involving every sort of method for igniting and blazing his life. That was a battle. But the one he really loved was still the Stupid Sword, because the Stupid Sword required courage and it was not a battle.

He only wanted to live and had never thought that he would need to battle. He had never liked to battle, but to live, there were times when battle was inevitable, especially when one needed to bear some responsibility.

Even now, he did not understand what responsibility Archbishop Mei Lisha wanted him to bear, but he had comprehended that sort of bearing.

Atop the great banyan tree, he closed his eyes yet did not sleep for the entire night.

At five o'clock in the morning, he opened his eyes, just as he had normally done every day, only this time his eyes were bloodshot. He took five deep breaths, steadied his heart and cleared his mind, then descended from the tree. After making a circuit around the lake and loosening his somewhat stiff and aching body, he went to the kitchen and ate two bowls of the porridge Xuanyuan Po had made. He even made an exception and ate half a salted duck egg.

"Today, there should be many people visiting the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education to offer their condolences. You should go as a representative of the Orthodox Academy," he said to Luoluo.

Thinking about the match that would take place today, Luoluo did not want to leave. However, she found herself incapable of resisting Chen Changsheng's eyes and nodded her head in assent.

As the morning faded away, the area outside Hundred Flowers Lane gradually began to grow lively. The space under the temporary awning was already full of seated people. The best seats did not belong to those people with the most power, but rather the painters and storytellers of the Four Great Markets. They had the responsibility of recording all the details of today's match and then spreading it to the entire capital and continent.

Zhou Ziheng had already arrived. He stood in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate, his mood somewhat regretful.

To use his Star Condensation cultivation and challenge a youth at Ethereal Opening, it was shameful no matter how he thought about it. In the end, however, his opponent was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. Thus, he believed that this fight today would inevitably cause his reputation to greatly increase. He didn't dare to say how much he would rise in the Proclamation of Liberation, but he could at least spread his name to many more people.

As an honored guest, reputation was often more important than strength.

To have this battle make his reputation even more resounding, he required spectators, especially spectators with a lot of power, not those painters and storytellers. Regretfully, Archbishop Mei Lisha died last night. Those powerful figures that would likely have appeared had all gone to the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education to offer their condolences. Consequently, he felt rather regretful, and even somewhat angry. You could die at any time; did you have to die now?

Chapter 442 - The Orthodox Academy's First Battle

It was noisy outside the Orthodox Academy, like a great cauldron in which water was boiling. Around that awning set up outside Hundred Flowers Lane, many storekeepers and stewards bustled around, taking the bets of the populace. As long as the battle had not begun, one could place their bet at any time. However, for some reason, the odds for both sides had not changed once since yesterday.

Not everyone was fond of gambling. There were even more people that had come purely to see the spectacle. After all, this was a grand occasion—after Chen Changsheng had accepted the position of Principal of the Orthodox Academy, he had entered the Garden of Zhou. This was his first public appearance after returning to the capital and today was a very important occasion for him. Simultaneously, today was also a very important occasion for the Orthodox Academy. If speaking of last year, that Chen Changsheng had become the first student of the Orthodox Academy in many years had a symbolic significance. Thus today's battle would be the Orthodox Academy's first battle after it had reappeared in the world.

If this were a story, then the following development would be that Chen Changsheng would logically obtain victory and the Orthodox Academy that had been in ruins for many years would proclaim its rebirth to the entire continent. Regretfully, everyone knew that today's story would not develop in such a fashion because his opponent was a Star Condensation expert. The first battle of the newly-reborn Orthodox Academy was highly likely to end dismally.

As the crowd gazed at the tightly-shut gate of the Orthodox Academy and the expressionless Zhou Ziheng standing before it, they were filled with all sorts of emotion. Everyone knew that the new rule of the All-School Martial Exhibition was a method for the alliance of the Tianhai clan and the new faction of the Orthodoxy to suppress Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy. Combined with the fact that the legendary wolf youth Zhexiu was still jailed in Zhou Prison, the unreachable figure of the Divine Empress became all the more visible behind this matter.

How could the Divine Empress possibly give the Orthodox Academy an actual chance of maturing? If the Orthodoxy had not been internally divided, then perhaps the Li Palace would have had an even fiercer response to this suppression and the Orthodox Academy would not have been forced into such humiliating circumstance. It was a pity that there were even many people within the Orthodoxy that were unwilling to see the Orthodox Academy truly be reborn—those two Sacred Hall archbishops that had proposed this All-School Martial Exhibition had already notified the continent of their stances. As the Pope changed his will, they still stood by the Divine Empress.

What made people sigh with sorrow was that these two Sacred Hall archbishops had received the deliberate care of the Pope, thus allowing them to stand amongst the Six Prefects and become two great trees that reached to the sky. It was also precisely because of the Pope that they associated with the Divine Empress. Although the Pope had changed his own position, it was impossible for him to change the positions of everyone in the Li Palace. When all was said and done, the Li Palace and the Divine Empress had been closely joined for more than two hundred years; how could this relationship be cut apart in a single day?

Archbishop Mei Lisha had died last night. The Pope had lost his once most powerful rival and also lost his most powerful comrade-in-arms. In addition, the Pope had to maintain his appearance of impartiality. Even if the Li Palace had even more opinions, it was still impossible for it to assist the Orthodox Academy under the watch of multitudinous gazes. Consequently, no matter how arduous today's battle was, no matter how dismal the conclusion, the Orthodox Academy would still have to fight it itself. In this past year, Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy, under the care of the Li Palace, had not undergone many storms or tribulations and had thus smoothly and healthily grown. Today, it wasn't necessary that the Orthodox Academy shelter the Li Palace from the storm, but it would at least have to start enduring the storm together with the Li Palace.

Of course, this was not at all fair, an opinion held by the vast majority of the crowd. According to the registers of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, the Four Great Markets had long since confirmed to the capital that the Orthodox Academy had only five students. Princess Luoluo's identity was too special, making it impossible for her to represent the Orthodox Academy in this match. Zhexiu, who was thought to be the most valiant by many, was still imprisoned in Zhou Prison. As a result, when the time came for the other academies and schools to issue their challenges, the Orthodox Academy truly did not have many choices to pick from. It could also be said that they lacked the space to maneuver.

This place had no experts with long-established fame, only young people.

The gate to the Orthodox Academy was pushed open. Chen

Changsheng walked out, Xuanyuan Po and Tang Thirty-Six following behind.

The street turned into an uproar and then swiftly grew silent.

In the Orthodox Academy's first battle, the one to battle was naturally Chen Changsheng, because he was the Principal.

Today, he wore a brand-new school uniform. The stitching was fine and dense, and the cuffs were tidied up in an extremely orderly fashion, on the whole giving off a very neat appearance. His black hair was tied tightly behind, and his delicate features looked exceptionally clean.

Walking up to the area in front of the gate, he gave a distant salute to that inn located within Hundred Flowers Lane. After that, he turned to Zhou Ziheng and nodded his head.

Considering his sixteen years of age, he truly was somewhat too calm and steady. However, he absolutely did not give off any feeling of sophistication or muddiness. Instead, he gave people the feeling of a cool breeze.

Solely on his bearing, he really did seem like a principal.

Expressions of sincere praise came from every direction.

The people who had come to see the spectacle were incapable of breaking through the imperial guards and Li Palace priests, so

could only watch from a distance. Although they couldn't see clearly, they felt and more and more that this young principal seemed to be very comfortable.

Last year's incident in the spring where the entire capital besieged the Orthodox Academy had already become a thing of the past. Even Archbishop Mei Lisha was already dead and the bloodstains on the steps of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had long since vanished. Who still remembered those things? After the Grand Examination, the Mausoleum of Books, and the Garden of Zhou, Chen Changsheng had become the pride of the Great Zhou. The capital was the capital of the Great Zhou, and the Orthodox Academy was in the capital. Naturally, the people of the capital viewed him as their own pride.

There was praise, there was discussion, and there were sighs of sorrow. From beginning to end, the crowd had always believed this battle to be unfair. The entire continent knew that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were the two youngest in history to enter the upper level of Ethereal Opening, cultivating geniuses. But ultimately, it was still just the upper level of Ethereal Opening. His opponent was Zhou Ziheng, a true expert at the initial level of Star Condensation. To be able to obtain victory through surpassing cultivation levels was an extremely rare sight. In today's battle, if Chen Changsheng wanted to obtain victory, he needed to surpass a massive gap in cultivation. Just how high was that threshold?

"Last night, I heard a knowledgeable guest from the Pavilion of Divination say that when Little Principal Chen was in Xunyang City confronting Zhu Luo, he didn't retreat a single step. Zhou Ziheng is only at Star Condensation—who said that he's certain to win?"

"Correct, I also heard that in Xunyang City, Little Principal Chen even managed to take an attack from that madman Xiao Zhang. Although he was no match, he didn't suffer too much."

The crowd was brimming with discussion. Surprisingly, the vast majority of people were actually optimistic about Chen Changsheng, or perhaps it was not optimism, but a sort of inclination towards him based on feeling.

"Everyone, please! You've all got to understand, no matter how high the level Little Principal Chen displayed in Xunyang was, at his side were Su Li and Wang Po! In addition, the entire situation was a mess, but now it's one on one." That person mocked, "I'm not going to argue with you all. If you really want to believe, then go and bet on the Orthodox Academy's victory."

The crowd momentarily grew quiet. As expected, the crowd only hoped that Chen Changsheng could obtain victory, but weren't at all optimistic about his chances. Not even a few people went to bet on the Orthodox Academy's victory.

"One to eleven, it's really impossible to bet on the Orthodox Academy."

"If this were some other upper level Ethereal Opening cultivator challenging a Star Condensation cultivator, do you think those guys who are even greedier than thieves would set odds? Let alone setting up an awning and dispatching so many people. It looks to me like the Four Great Markets also think Little Principal Chen

will lose, but he should at least be able to hold on for a long time."

"Even if Zhou Ziheng is only at the initial level of Star Condensation, if he wants to defeat an opponent a full cultivation level below him, does he really need a very long time?"

"Don't forget, back then when Wang Po was at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, just how he managed to cut his initial level Star Condensation opponent into a madman."

"Although I also think Little Principal Chen is very terrific, I don't think he's up to that year's Wang Po. Don't you forget, it was in that very same battle where Wang Po succeeded in breaking into Star Condensation."

"And don't you forget, at the beginning of the year, Little Principal Chen only entered Ethereal Opening at the very last battle of the Grand Examination."

"It's exactly because I didn't forget that I think this is impossible. In the short span of a year, how can he perform such a feat twice, unless it's a miracle."

The spectators engaged in spirited discussion, fiercely debating with each other, but only the amount bet and the number of people displayed their true opinion.

Just as the crowd had analyzed, amongst the Four Great Markets and the powerful figures of the capital, not a one viewed Chen

Changsheng in an optimistic light, despite the shocking talent and battle prowess he had displayed in the Garden of Zhou and Xunyang City. This was because in that battle within Xunyang City, Chen Changsheng was not the main role. As for the battles that took place before Xunyang City, those had no spectators.

Clear Lake Restaurant's top floor today was clear of customers. There was only one person eating there because this person had always believed that admiring the lake most necessitated not the weather, but peace and quiet. It was currently summer, so the famed crab banquet of Clear Lake Restaurant was naturally impossible to serve. However, the table was still densely arrayed with dozens of dishes. Every dish was probably more expensive than the cost of one year of a commoner's living expenses.

Such an extravagant individual was naturally no ordinary person.

In the plate in front of Tianhai Chenwu was a blue lobster from the Great Western Continent. Its flesh which was as white as jade, yet much more tender and cold, had been sliced by the wondrous knife of Clear Lake Restaurant's head chef into the shape of chrysanthemum flowers.

He brought up his chopsticks, but in the next moment, shook his head and put them back down.

He had no appetite because of the reports in his hand. The bloody scenes described in those reports were truly somewhat nauseating. These reports described the battles Chen Changsheng had with Divine General Xue He and Liang Hongzhuang, as well as that

tyrant of the north, Lin Pingyuan. The first two battles had been personally described by Xue He and Liang Hongzhuang. The final battle, because all involved had been killed by Chen Changsheng, had been deduced from the scene after the battle.

After confirming something or the other, Tianhai Chenwu's mood greatly improved. He took up his chopsticks once again, pinched a morsel of lobster flesh, and conveyed it into his lips. As he slowly chewed upon it, his mouth felt sweet.

"Now that you don't have Su Li, how can you possibly win?"

In the entire capital, there was no one optimistic about Chen Changsheng.

The archbishop that was optimistic about Chen Changsheng was at this very moment peacefully sleeping amidst the plum blossoms.

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education was laden with grief, but many priests cast their gazes in the direction of the Orthodox Academy.

Luoluo sat at the edge of the plum blossoms, fulfilling her obligation as the representative of the Orthodox Academy. Suddenly, she heard a sound from the distance. Walking to the window, she gazed in the direction of the Orthodox Academy, her two hands tightly curling into fists.

Master will definitely win.

Even if nobody else was optimistic about Chen Changsheng, she still believed that Chen Changsheng would obtain the final victory. She had no reason.

At some point, Mo Yu had come to the Orthodox Academy.

She had not come to the Orthodox Academy's gate to spectate the battle. There were already many powerful figures there to oversee. At this very moment, Xue Xingchuan was in that tea house. There was no need for her to go over.

Somehow, she appeared in Chen Changsheng's room.

She did not sleep. She sat in front of the window, gazing at the luxuriant trees of the Orthodox Academy, thinking about something.

Suddenly, a boom erupted from the front of the academy.

She narrowed her eyes and turned them to that sound.

Without the slightest omen, the Orthodox Academy's first battle had begun.

Zhou Ziheng had taken out his sword.

Chen Changsheng had taken out his sword.

Each of them had launched an attack.

The Li Palace priests responsible for recording the scene could not tear their eyes away.

The several dozen painters and storytellers anxiously watched the battle.

The several thousand spectators from the capital made absolutely no sound.

In various parts of the capital, there were even more people waiting to hear the latest news about the battle and see the latest drawings.

The only organizations capable of this were the Four Great Markets.

There were some painters with masterful sight who, in the instant that Chen Changsheng and Zhou Ziheng took out their swords, began to put their brushes to the paper.

Particularly, the painter from the Pavilion of Divination, who himself possessed the cultivation of the Star Condensation Realm who, with a hasty flash of his brush, produced a vivid image on the paper. Although it was done carelessly, it had managed to perfectly capture the energy and movement of those two swords.

After a moment, this image was transmitted via magical artifact to various places across the capital.

This was a sketch, extremely simple and hasty. If one did not know what this drawing was depicting, it could even be mistaken for the random scrawls of a child that had just learned how to write.

The room was silent. The students of the Heavenly Dao Academy surrounded the table, their minds filled with countless doubts. And yet, none of them dared to voice them—none of them dared to disturb the man sitting before the table as he viewed the drawing.

Out of reverence, out of love and respect, no student of the Heavenly Dao Academy dared to approach that person, because that person was Senior Guan Bai.

If one were to say that Zhuang Huanyu who had committed suicide a few days ago had been the pride of the Heavenly Dao Academy for these past two years, then Guan Bai was the pride of the Heavenly Dao Academy for the past ten years. Just like all those other figures on the Proclamation of Liberation, Guan Bai had his own title: Famous Name Guan Bai.

In these past few years, it was precisely because of him that the Heavenly Dao Academy's famous name did not decline.

Guan Bai's eyebrows were like swords and were slightly weathered. It was very obvious that he had just returned from far away.

When his gaze fell upon that simple scrawl on that piece of paper, it became sharper, like a true sword.

His finger hovered in the air, tracing the light stroke on the paper. It swished as it went, as if there was sword intent on the edge of the finger as it flew through the air.

After some time, he withdrew his finger, withdrew his sight, and then gazed out the window in the direction of the Orthodox Academy. With a complicated expression, he said, "A good sword."

Finally, a student could no longer hold back his question. "Senior, just who won in the end?"

The moment this question was asked, it immediately attracted the countless gazes of his schoolmates, and every one of those gazes was brimming with disapproval. The battle between Chen Changsheng and Zhou Ziheng had just begun, and this drawing only recorded their first attacks. It was simply impossible to determine the winner and loser solely from this. This question had disturbed Senior Guan Bai and was extremely stupid.

None of these Heavenly Dao Academy students imagined that Guan Bai would actually make a determination.

He gazed at the lines on the paper, the ink that had just congealed, the dragging lines of the brush. Suddenly, his eyes lit up with sword glow.

Then he declared, "Chen Changsheng has won."

Chapter 443 - A Clumsy Swordsman

In those hasty brushstrokes, Guan Bai saw Zhou Ziheng's technique that seemed like a solitary boat emerging from a place beyond the heavens. The energy it carried was, as expected, majestic and boundless.

But he could even more vividly make out Chen Changsheng's technique.

That technique was just a single word.

Just a single word.

Like a great dam, like an iron chain, like the stones of a cliff, like a sword being brought up to slit the throat in suicide.

Guan Bai faintly felt a pain in his chest.

If his junior brother had been able to understand the principles behind this sword strike, taking the 'straight' from all things, how could things have reached this point?

He gazed at his bewildered schoolmates and said, "This technique—Chen Changsheng has practiced it at least ten thousand times."

The students of the Heavenly Dao Academy were perplexed. They asked, "Is just that enough?"

"From what I understand, Chen Changsheng has practiced the sword for not more than a year. In this brief period of time, he took such a simple technique and practiced it ten thousand times."

Guan Bai emotionlessly continued, "If a person so clumsy with a sword has managed to respond to Zhou Ziheng's attack, how could Zhou Ziheng possibly win?"

After saying this, he shook his head, got up, and walked out of the room.

The scenery of the Heavenly Dao Academy was like a painting. No matter where you walked, it was all scenic, such as that lake and mountain directly ahead.

At the edge of the lake stood a man with a very lonely figure.

He was the Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Zhuang Huanyu's father.

He turned around and said to Guan Bai, "Your evaluation of Chen Changsheng is very high."

Guan Bai replied, "Since he's already been decided as my opponent, my evaluation should be even more cold and objective."

Principal Zhuang asked, "If I were to tell you that Chen

Changsheng only learned that technique at most thirty days ago, would your evaluation of him be even higher?"

At these words, Guan Bai did not speak for a very long time. Finally, he said, "Despite what Sir thinks, in the end, Zhuang Huanyu was my junior brother. I have to do a few things on his behalf."

Principal Zhuang sighed, "It seems you will definitely have to participate in the Boiling Stone Summit."

Guan Bai replied, "Yes, because I want to know, if I give Chen Changsheng three hundred more days, just how far his technique will progress."

At the gate of the Orthodox Academy, Zhou Ziheng's sword carried the powerful force of a storm. If the Li Palace priests had not come last night to set up a spell array in advance, the surrounding spectators all might have been injured by this sword energy.

Precisely as Guan Bai had seen in that drawing, Chen Changsheng only used a single technique.

Of course, it was impossible that he only used one technique. Here, one technique meant he used that one technique many times. From the moment Zhou Ziheng's sword came carrying a storm to the final cessation of the berserk winds and great waves, he only used one technique.

In Guan Bai's eyes, he was a person clumsy with the sword, so the technique he used was naturally also somewhat clumsy.

It was precisely the third sword that Su Li had taught him.

This sword had a very idiotic name: the Stupid Sword.

This technique looked very stupid. Sometimes it looked like one was toting a carrying pole, sometimes it looked like one was leading a horse, and other times it looked like one was prepared to slit their own throat. In short, it didn't seem at all like one was attacking with a sword.

The edges of the sword were never exposed outward and the sword itself always remained flat and straight in front of his body.

This seemingly very simple technique was actually not simple at all, because not even Su Li had managed to successfully train in it. In reality, Chen Changsheng was the first person to ever learn the Stupid Sword.

In order to train in this technique, nothing was required. Talent and comprehension were both unnecessary. It only required incessant practice, stupid and clumsy repetition, and also the firm belief that this technique could be learned.

Zhou Ziheng's sword truly was powerful. His sword energy was like a wave, incessantly crashing towards Chen Changsheng. Yet no matter what he did, Zhou Ziheng could not get past this

technique.

The sword in Chen Changsheng's hand had turned into an iron chain pulled taut by a massive boat, it had become an unbending tree.

Zhou Ziheng's sword that was like a solitary boat had been stymied.

Zhou Ziheng's sword that had come like a storm had also been stymied.

No matter how ingenious Zhou Ziheng's sword techniques were, they found it impossible to break through Chen Changsheng's defense. The edge of his sword stabbed countless times against Chen Changsheng's sword, causing innumerable sparks to shoot out.

When the two swords clashed, they emitted boundless light. The vast majority of spectators were so blinded that they covered up their eyes. They all thought in astonishment that Zhou Ziheng truly was worthy of being called a Star Condensation expert. His sword emerged like the wind and needed only an instant to press down on Chen Changsheng, forcing him to retreat step by step.

Ordinary people could not understand the state of the battle, but naturally, there were people that could understand it.

In the moment that Chen Changsheng took out his sword, a cry

of surprise burst out from the pavilion. As the painter from the Pavilion of Divination began to draw his second picture, the tip of his brush began to tremble.

In the tea house within Hundred Flowers Lane, Xue Xingchuan sat by the window gazing at the sword glows that blazed with incomparable brilliance. He silently thought about the letter from his brother, and then thought to himself, this child has actually managed to take another step in his swordplay.

The sword glows made it impossible to look at the battle directly. It was like numberless lightning bolts flashing.

Accompanying them were countless peals of thunder.

In the next moment, the rumbling of clashing swords suddenly came to a halt.

Zhou Ziheng drew back his sword. As he stared at Chen Changsheng who had already been pushed to right in front of the gate, he was filled with an indescribable shock.

He could never have imagined that Chen Changsheng would actually be able to defend against so many of his attacks!

It must be known that his Stormswept Solitary Boat Sword emphasized energy and was exceptionally tyrannical, not even mentioning the fact that he was at Star Condensation Realm while Chen Changsheng was only at Ethereal Opening!

Even if Chen Changsheng's swordplay was even more exquisite, taking into account the difference in cultivation, just how had Chen Changsheng been able to block so many of his attacks? He wasn't even injured, and not even the hands holding his sword had begun to tremble!

Soon after, the shock in Zhou Ziheng's eyes was fiercely and harshly removed and his partially damaged self-confidence became firm once more.

Because Chen Changsheng had retreated.

He had not allowed Zhou Ziheng's Stormswept Solitary Boat Sword to fall upon his body, but he also had not been able to stand firm.

Ultimately, he was still at the Ethereal Opening Realm. Even though his body had been bathed in dragon blood, even though he possessed a strong body and strength on par with that of a Star Condensation cultivator, there was still a gap that he could not fill.

Particularly because his meridians were broken. There was no need to compare his output of true essence with Zhou Ziheng, because his output of true essence was less than even that of cultivators at the same level as him.

Zhou Ziheng recalled the details of their recent clash. Based on the vibrations he had felt from his sword whenever they clashed, he was able to confirm this fact.

Xue Xingchuan in the tea house and the powerful figures under the awning also simultaneously confirmed this fact.

Chen Changsheng's swordplay truly was exceptionally exquisite and his strength was even more freakish beyond belief, but his output of true essence was insufficient.

His true essence was insufficient to endure this level of battle.

The cultivations of these individuals were not at all weaker than Guan Bai's, and a powerful figure like Xue Xingchuan even far surpassed him. However, they were not people that walked the path of the sword.

It was impossible for them to read from Chen Changsheng's swordplay his self-confidence.

Zhou Ziheng was a person that walked the path of the sword, but he was also one of the people involved, so he also could not read it.

He believed that he had seen through Chen Changsheng's weakness, causing his self-confidence to be reborn.

He gazed at Chen Changsheng, his lips revealing a mocking smile as he prepared to say a few words.

Chen Changsheng gave him no chance. He directly thrust his

sword at him.

At this time, the gate of the Orthodox Academy was very quiet, like the moment before daybreak, or the eve of a storm.

At these times, there would often be the cry of a bird, or a swallow flying low. And then the sun would break over the horizon, the rain would come crashing down.

This was a sort of tempo.

Chen Changsheng's attack very simply broke this tempo.

Because this tempo was broken, both Zhou Ziheng and the spectators felt extremely uneasy.

The sun had arrived too quickly, the rain had too abruptly descended.

Too sudden.

From the awning came the sounds of tables and chairs abruptly being overturned.

In the tea house, Xue Xingchuan quickly stood up, his face filled with disbelief.

In a battle, breaking an opponent's tempo was a very common sight.

The problem was that there were very few people that could do it as naturally as Chen Changsheng.

The true reason for their shock lay within, because it was highly likely that this indicated that this battle's tempo...had actually been in Chen Changsheng's hands the entire time!

The gap between Star Condensation and Ethereal Opening was extraordinarily vast. In this sort of battle, the latter could struggle bitterly, engage in bloody battle, and explode with talent. They could even be like Wang Po and miraculously break through in the middle of the battle. But for the weaker side to actually be in control of the battle's tempo the entire time, to completely use the mentality of an expert to face his opponent, just what sort of self-confidence was this!?

Just where did his self-confidence come from!?

Some of the people under the awning had been able to understand, and as a result tossed their tea cups away in absolute shock and kicked over their tables and chairs.

In the tea house, Xue Xingchuan has also understood, so he quickly stood up, so shocked that he could find nothing to say.

Chen Changsheng's self-confidence was in his sword.

This single sword.

The first sword which he sent towards Zhou Ziheng.

This sword so wondrous that it seemed made by the heavens.

This sword that was absolutely unavoidable.

This sword that had already cut off Zhou Ziheng's every path of retreat.

If Zhou Ziheng had decided to retreat with his fastest speed the moment Chen Changsheng had launched his attack, then perhaps he would still have a chance, but he did not.

Because he was in the Star Condensation Realm, while Chen Changsheng was in the Ethereal Opening Realm. When he represented the Temple Seminary in challenging the Orthodox Academy, everyone had felt that it was an example of the strong bullying the weak and looked upon him with extreme contempt. Under these circumstances, if he were to be forced back by Chen Changsheng's one attack, he would be losing face. Of course, he knew that this one attack of Chen Changsheng's was assuredly very powerful. Whether it was based on the rumors that he was the Pope's junior or that he had traveled together for many days with that master of the path of the sword, this attack was inevitably not simple. Thus, he also chose to not receive, but rather avoid it.

As a result, he realized in amazement that Chen Changsheng's sword gave off the feeling that he could not avoid it.

Just what sort of sword was this?

At the most dangerous moment, Zhou Ziheng finally renounced all obsessions and returned to the mindset of a swordsman. With a clear whistle, the longsword slashed down several times through the air.

A protective screen that was difficult to describe was birthed from his sword energy, cutting him off from Chen Changsheng.

On that protective screen faintly flowed beautiful starlight. That starlight had come from his sword, but its source was an even higher and more distant place—the sky.

This was the most powerful method of Star Condensation experts and was also precisely the reason why the Star Condensation Realm was so named.

Star Condensation experts were able to use their true essence to forcefully reverse the flow of starlight, as if their Fated Stars had entered their bodies. From this, they were able to form their own domain called the Star Domain. The Star Domain was a world formed from themselves. Within, the radiance of the stars would flow without end. It was nigh-perfect and could be described as impregnable. It could only be crushed by an even higher cultivation or an even more powerful true essence.

When a Meditation Realm cultivating genius fought an Ethereal Opening Realm cultivator, there was still a slight possibility of surpassing cultivation levels and obtaining victory. For instance, Luoluo's innate blood talent was extremely tyrannical. At the Meditation Realm, she could fight against ordinary cultivators at the initial level of Ethereal Opening. However, an Ethereal Opening Realm cultivator wanting to obtain victory over a Star Condensation cultivator was basically impossible, precisely because of the existence of the Star Domain.

Unless it was absolutely necessary, Zhou Ziheng did not want to use the Star Domain, because that would be far too unseemly.

But at this moment, he had to use it because Chen Changsheng's sword was truly too frightening.

In front of the Orthodox Academy, starlight shone as if it wished to vie with the sun in radiance.

Shocked cries rose up from the crowd, and it was also possible to hear the sounds of cursing.

Under the awning, some people had sat back down, especially those powerful figures that supported the Tianhai clan. They even revealed smiles.

However, Xue Xingchuan did not sit back down. He continued to watch the battle.

In his Star Domain, Zhou Ziheng had an extremely ugly expression. Even if he won today's battle, he had won in too unsightly a fashion.

But victory was always better than defeat.

Separated by the faint star radiance and watching Chen Changsheng's sword, he wanted to tell his opponent 'although you cannot defeat me, that you forced me to reveal my Star Domain is something to be proud of.'

These words were not bad, carrying some of the bearing of a capable senior.

Zhou Ziheng thought this way. After Chen Changsheng's sword was blocked by his Star Domain and his own sword easily obtained victory, he was prepared to say similar words before the crowd.

And then, he heard a soft squelch.

What sound was this?

That was the sound of a sword piercing into his body.

That was the sound of Chen Changsheng's sword piercing into his body.

Chen Changsheng's sword, without the slightest pause, pierced through his Star Domain and stabbed into his chest.

His face instantly paled and his mind filled with an inconceivable shock. He yelled in rage, "How can this be!"

Several howls of shock erupted from beneath the awning. "Just what's going on here!"

Chapter 444 - The Sword Is Like The Person

(I)

Just like that, Chen Changsheng's sword effortlessly pierced into Zhou Ziheng's stomach, as if that Star Domain had never existed.

Those who understood what the Star Condensation Realm signified were all incredibly astonished and shocked beyond belief.

Chen Changsheng wasn't surprised in the least. He was very calm. Just as Xue Xingchuan and those powerful figures had shockingly surmised, from the very start of this battle, the tempo had always been in his hands.

To human cultivators, being able to condense a Star Domain was the most important development. Only by successfully entering Star Condensation and obtaining this incredibly powerful defense could one battle on equal terms against the demon experts with their almost flawless bodies. In the human world, there was this deep-rooted way of thinking: a cultivator who possessed a Star Domain was in a naturally invincible position when facing a cultivator without a Star Domain. Thus, when Zhou Ziheng revealed his Star Domain, everyone believed that Chen Changsheng would definitely lose. They all believed that he continued to attack solely as a means of soothing his soul. It was merely a willful attack.

Zhou Ziheng also thought this way.

However, Chen Changsheng had never thought this way. He had

learned the sword on his own and so he had no laws or beliefs. Perhaps it could be said that he did not know that a sword of lower cultivation could not break through a Star Domain.

In fact, his later tutelage under Su Li was so lawless that the first sword Su Li had taught was for the purpose of breaking through the Star Domain of a Star Condensation cultivator.

Of course, this was the first sword he had learned from Su Li in the wilderness: the Intellectual Sword.

A few days ago in the early morning, Tianhai Ya'er had come to the gate of the Orthodox Academy to yell and curse while Zhou Ziheng silently stood by his wheelchair. The next few days repeated this scene.

Chen Changsheng had done nothing. Everyone believed that he was being patient, waiting for the Li Palace to appear. Later on, they believed that he was waiting for Tang Thirty-Six to emerge from the Mausoleum of Books.

Yes, he truly was waiting, but he was also preparing, especially after he learned that the two Sacred Hall archbishops were targeting the Orthodox Academy in bringing up the matter of the All-School Martial Exhibition.

For this single attack, he had prepared for many hours. Through Priest Xin, he was able to obtain all sorts of information about Zhou Ziheng. When those filthy words were being yelled out without end in front of the Orthodox Academy, he had been in the

library studying. He had been studying the history of the Hall of Subjugation, the story of the Temple Seminary, as well as the sword style called Stormswept Solitary Boat. He knew of Zhou Ziheng's life history, of this person's coldness, his avarice, his selfishness, his good name. He had found reports of seven battles which Zhou Ziheng had engaged in and had figured out that his left arm had once been heavily injured. He knew that this person's favorite food was the crab from Clear Lake Restaurant.

Countless matters concerning Zhou Ziheng were all in Chen Changsheng's mind. It could even be said that in certain aspects, he knew more about Zhou Ziheng than Zhou Ziheng himself.

This information was all gathered in his mind, then it began to be sorted and classified. Lastly, he began his calculations and deductions.

He needed to find the weakness in Zhou Ziheng's sword style, and it was even more vital that he find the weakness in Zhou Ziheng's Star Domain in advance.

The true domain of the stars in the night sky was incessantly moving, on occasion revealing gaps—the Star Domain of a human, even more so. Back then in the wilderness when he was facing off against Xue He and Liang Hongzhuang, even when his sword was almost at their bodies, he had still been able to find the weak points of their Star Domain. This time, he had spent such a long time calculating and deducing in the Orthodox Academy that breaking through Zhou Ziheng's Star Domain was not interesting at all. On the contrary, it would have been truly strange if he had failed to do so.

So he found it, and then he broke through it.

The Intellectual Sword was not a sword, it was a fighting method involving calculation and analysis. The previous period of silence; yesterday's sudden agreement; the Stupid Sword he had used just now; his retreat to the stone steps; and then that emerging of the morning before the birdsong, the downpour of rain before the swallow could fly low—all this was part of the Intellectual Sword.

The actual sword technique he had used was one of the most ordinary techniques of the Orthodoxy. It was called the Vexing Night Rain.

Zhou Ziheng's Star Domain seemed magnificent, but it was actually not strong.

This was the weakness that Chen Changsheng had identified through his calculations.

As for the specific position of the weak point, it was in front of his feet.

The Vexing Night Rain, the sword falling like the rain, had directly pierced through the blue gown below Zhou Ziheng's knee, but it had not yet stabbed completely into his stomach.

With a squelch, blood spurted out.

Zhou Ziheng's face was pale, his eyes filled with shock and disbelief.

With a howl, he transformed into a storm and swiftly retreated into the depths of Hundred Flowers Lane.

Chen Changsheng's sword had not been able to completely stab into his stomach. He believed that this was because his opponent's true essence was lacking.

Although he had suffered severe injury, he still had the strength to fight. As long as he could break away from Chen Changsheng's sword, he had the chance to counterattack.

There was a sudden gale as Zhou Ziheng, confronted by the specter of death, exploded with an unimaginable power. Forcefully crashing through the spell array of the Li Palace priests, he retreated into the main street.

It must be known that the distance from here to the gate of the Orthodox Academy was over a hundred zhang!

And yet, he still could not escape from the sword in Chen Changsheng's hand.

Zhou Ziheng suddenly realized that he had forgotten something.

Before this test of swords, the Tianhai clan had prepared for him all sorts of information. Although he had only glanced over it out

of self-confidence, he still remembered that this youth, through some sort of lucky chance, had actually learned the Yeshi Step of the demons. Although it wasn't the real and complete Yeshi Step, it let his opponent increase his speed to a terrifying level.

If this were any normal time, then Zhou Ziheng would have had countless ways to respond to this, but at present, he could only swiftly retreat in panic. How could he possibly have time to think of these counters?

Zhou Ziheng was just like a boat in the middle of a vast ocean, bobbing up and down and incessantly retreating.

Chen Changsheng was like the water of this ocean, always following and not letting him get even one step away.

With panicked shouts, the crowd scattered and then retreated to the ends of the street.

As the winds calmed, Chen Changsheng and Zhou Ziheng stood in the middle of the street.

Several powerful figures under the awning emitted their Qi in order to prevent the Qi from the battle from injuring the crowd.

But there was no more need.

Chen Changsheng's sword had already penetrated through Zhou Ziheng's chest.

Blood flowed down from the sword and continuously dripped onto the ground.

Xue Xingchuan in his teahouse was once more struck speechless.

Zhou Ziheng's judgment was not wrong. The amount of true essence that Chen Changsheng could use was too little, so the sword energy was not forceful. Xue Xingchuan could naturally understand this point as well. Consequently, even though he had confirmed that Chen Changsheng's swordplay had really come from that man, he did not believe that the sword would have much strength after breaking through Zhou Ziheng's Star Domain.

Chen Changsheng's sword had once again overturned the so-called common sense. It was clearly not powerful, but it still easily pierced through Zhou Ziheng's body.

Why?

"It's not that sword technique he used in Xunyang City where he exploded his life and true essence."

At one end of the street, inside a gloomy carriage, an official was quickly jotting something down on a piece of paper.

Viewing the scene from the window, he thought a bit more, then wrote another sentence on the paper.

"There is possibly something strange about that sword."

There was soft and tiny sound.

Chen Changsheng withdrew his sword.

Grasping his stomach, Zhou Ziheng collapsed onto the street.

There were already people from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green waiting on the side. They hurried over to treat his wounds.

Zhou Ziheng was in terrible pain and also very perplexed. He asked, "This...what sword is it?"

The street was very quiet.

The surrounding crowd, the people under the awning, and Xue Xingchuan in the tea house were all waiting for Chen Changsheng's answer.

Chen Changsheng glanced at the sword in his hand. Blood continued to flow down the edge and drip to the ground. Not a single drop remained behind, and the body of the sword once again shone, unstained by dust.

This dagger had been given to him by Senior Yu Ren. At the moment, it contained the sword soul of Chen Xuanba's Dragoncry

Sword.

But in the end, he was not Chen Xuanba. In the end, he possessed his own sword intent.

From the Garden of Zhou to the snowy plains, from Xunyang City to the capital, his sword intent had finally matured.

Therefore it was also time for this sword to have its own name.

Chen Changsheng pondered this, then finally said, "Let's call it... Stainless."

Chapter 445 - The Sword Is Like The Person (II)

In that carriage at the end of the street, the official was still writing his report. On this paper, he wrote, "According to the information from Xunyang City and the accumulated analysis, Su Li should have passed on three sword techniques to Chen Changsheng. One of them can help him quickly ignite his true essence. It possesses an enormous power. It had originally been surmised that he would use this technique. Unexpectedly, Zhou Ziheng's level was lacking and he was unable to force out this technique."

There was another official in the carriage who had similarly come from the Department for Purging Officials. Supplementing this report, he said, "It is possible that it has to do with Chen Changsheng's dagger being too sharp."

The official holding the brush fell silent, then said uncertainly, "But that sword clearly didn't give off any ripples of Qi. Is just sharpness enough?"

The other official also had no way of confirming this. Besides those legendary divine weapons, what sort of sword could so effortlessly pierce through the body of a Star Condensation cultivator?

At the moment, the street was very quiet. All gazes were fixed on the dagger in Chen Changsheng's hand.

That dagger looked very common and unremarkable, but everyone knew that it was definitely not as ordinary as it seemed.

For a long while, the painter that had come from the Pavilion of Divination could not draw his third picture, with the right hand holding his brush incessantly shaking.

He was already incredibly shocked. It must be known that the Pavilion of Divination was responsible for evaluating and choosing the weapons to be placed on the Tier of Legendary Weapons. His insight was naturally not ordinary. With a single glance, he was able to tell the extraordinary properties of that dagger in Chen Changsheng's hands.

Yes, the dagger did not exude any Qi. It was just sharp.

Anything, if developed to the absolute pinnacle, would be exceptionally frightening.

If a sword was sharp to an unimaginable degree, was anything else needed? Even the support of sacred Qi was not required.

What shocked the painter even more was that Chen Changsheng's dagger was obviously not an old object.

"Stainless..." The painter from the Pavilion of Divination thought in astonishment, could it be that a new name will finally appear on this year's Tier of Legendary Weapons?

The conclusion of this battle before the gates of the Orthodox Academy was quickly spread to the entire capital. At the top floor of Clear Lake Restaurant, Tianhai Chenwu was admiring the natural beauty of the lake and mountains. Suddenly, he felt somewhat annoyed. However, a powerful figure such as he took only a moment to recover. He calmly thought, it turns out that he already had the strength to surpass cultivation levels. Then it's fine to continue. My Tianhai clan is master of the four seas with countless powerful experts at its beck and call. I'm really interested to see just how long the Orthodox Academy can last by relying on this young principal.

Then he turned to the subordinate kneeling on the ground. Smiling, he said, "I no longer wish to eat. Finish off the dishes on the table. Don't waste any."

The subordinate raised his head in amazement. Gazing at the dozens of dishes on the table as well as the massive blue lobster, he thought in panic, just how can I finish it all?

Tianhai Chenwu's smile vanished. As he began making his way out of Clear Lake Restaurant, he emotionlessly said to his subordinate as he walked past, "If you can't finish it, then your entire family doesn't need to live anymore."

The lake of the Heavenly Dao Academy was similarly quiet and beautiful, except there was no restaurant on the lakeshore, only cliffs and willows.

Principal Zhuang stood beneath the willow branches, gazing at Guan Bai's back. He seemed to want to say something, but

ultimately chose not to, only sighing.

Suddenly, several Heavenly Dao Academy students rushed over. Guan Bai halted his steps and turned his head.

"Chen Changsheng won!" A student yelled at Principal Zhuang from afar. Simultaneously, he turned to Senior Guan Bai with a face brimming with admiration.

Previously, Guan Bai had only needed to look at that hasty drawing to conclude that Chen Changsheng would inevitably obtain victory. This sort of insight and experience was truly extraordinary. Yet what took these students by surprise was that when Guan Bai heard the news that Chen Changsheng had won, his sword-like eyebrows leapt up. It was obvious that he was rather taken aback. This was because not even he had imagined that Chen Changsheng would win so quickly.

He had only disdain for Zhou Ziheng's swordplay and paid a great deal of attention to Chen Changsheng. However, there was still an entire cultivation level of difference between the two of them. He had originally believed that even if Chen Changsheng were to win, he would have relied on the mental technique of the old school of the Orthodoxy as well as the unswerving determination of his sword heart. Only after a long and bitter struggle would he finally be able to obtain victory. And yet...from the time the drawing of the first clash had arrived to his speaking a few words to Principal Zhuang, only a short time had passed. In such a brief span of time, Chen Changsheng was able to win?

"What sort of sword technique did he use?" Guan Bai asked.

"I don't know." The student shook his head, then he swiftly handed over the just-transmitted second drawing to Guan Bai.

Guan Bai took the drawing and saw countless lines drawn across the paper, in such disorder that it was hard to make anything out.

"From the drawing, it would seem that both sides attacked so many times that even the sir from the Pavilion of Divination could not draw it out clearly. It's just that no matter how you calculate the time, it doesn't match up," one student said in confusion.

Guan Bai gazed at the several hundred fine and faint lines on the paper. Wrinkling his brow, he said, "These aren't the trajectories of swords, it's a Star Domain."

The Heavenly Dao Academy students were even more shocked by this statement. They thought to themselves, Zhou Ziheng so quickly used his Star Domain? Just how powerful is Chen Changsheng? What stunned them even more was that Zhou Ziheng had used his Star Domain, but Chen Changsheng had still won. Just how had he done it?

There was still one more line on this drawing, coarse and faint, extremely uninteresting, but the strength of the stroke penetrated through the back of the paper.

Guan Bai gazed at this brushstroke. Abruptly, a sword glow flickered through his eyes. Several willow branches at his side were buffeted by the wind and then snapped into approximately a

dozen chunks that fell into the lake.

"He still only used one sword technique," he murmured. "This technique..."

He did not continue, instead shaking his head.

Previously, when he saw Chen Changsheng's first sword technique, he had said that it was a good sword.

Now when he saw Chen Changsheng's second sword technique, he realized that he didn't know how to evaluate it.

"Although his sword is fast, even if he were given ten years, he still wouldn't be able to catch up to you."

At some point, the principal had come to his side. Looking at Guan Bai, he said, "Is there any need to be so anxious?"

"The demons could invade south at any time. I will go to Snowhold Pass. Ten years later...perhaps I might already be dead, so before I leave the capital, I must bring this matter to a close."

Guan Bai calmly continued, "It was just that I didn't imagine that his sword would be so strong. If it's like this, I have to personally take a look."

With this statement, the willows by the lake rustled in the

breeze, the summer winds gusted up, and his figure vanished.

The sorrowful mood of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, with news of Chen Changsheng's victory, became very much less so.

In that room in the deepest depths of the great hall, Luoluo was actually very calm. She had never doubted that Chen Changsheng would be able to emerge victorious in this battle.

Similarly, the archbishop in his room of plum blossoms was also very calm, as if he was sleeping.

The priests of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green were treating Zhou Ziheng's wounds.

Zhou Ziheng grasped his stomach, but blood had already ceased to flow from between his fingers. However, his face was as pale as a sheet of paper.

He knew that Chen Changsheng had gone easy on him. When that sharp dagger had grazed past his internal organs, it had only done so by a hair's breadth.

If Chen Changsheng's wrist had given the smallest shake, if the tiniest strand of true essence had been released, Zhou Ziheng's Ethereal Palace would have been completely destroyed and he would have died on the scene.

Thinking about Chen Changsheng's graceful sword technique

that had broken through his Star Domain, Zhou Ziheng was taken hold of by a monstrous fear. With a shaky voice, he said, "This... just what sort of sword is this?"

Yes, he had asked not about the dagger in Chen Changsheng's hand, but about his sword technique.

Ultimately, he still walked the path of the sword. After such an excessively crushing defeat, this was what he most wanted to know.

Chen Changsheng naturally knew that he was not asking about the Vexing Night Rain that he had used in the final moment. Rather, he wanted to know how his Star Domain had been broken through.

Of course, Chen Changsheng would not give too extensive of an explanation. He only said, "This was a sword technique that Senior Su Li passed down to me."

Hearing the two words 'Su Li', the peaceful street suddenly became bustling again as the crowd erupted with discussion.

As it turned out...Chen Changsheng had used Su Li's sword technique!

The continent contained countless experts, not just those experts on the proclamations of the Pavilion of Divination. There were still many exceptional experts who stood above these proclamations.

Who was weak and who was strong amongst these experts had always been the most interesting topic with the common people and also the matter which attracted the most commentary. There was only one matter that no one had ever questioned, that did not require discussion. It was a fact publicly acknowledged by the continent, and even in the past one thousand years, was a conclusion reached by the vast majority of the populace.

Zhou Dufu, number one in the path of the blade.

Emperor Taizong, number one in the path of the spear.

Su Li, number one in the path of the sword!

At Chen Changsheng's words, the expressions directed towards him were all rather queer. This was especially true of those people under the pavilion that walked the path of the sword. Their emotions were extremely complicated: admiration, envy, frustration, resentment, and so on. Zhou Ziheng was even more wracked with remorse—if he knew that Su Li had actually taught Chen Changsheng sword techniques, how could he possibly have been so arrogant and self-assured!

Yes, the information provided by the Tianhai clan had mentioned and the entire continent knew of what had gone on in Xunyang City, but still no one believed that Su Li would pass a sword technique on to Chen Changsheng. Because Su Li was very lonely and very proud and his gaze was set very high, for him to pass down a technique was absolutely no trifling matter. In addition, Chen Changsheng was the successor to the Orthodoxy, a natural enemy of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

"So that's it." Zhou Ziheng stared at Chen Changsheng and said resentfully, "Or else how could you surpass cultivation levels and defeat me!"

Chen Changsheng shook his head at these words. "No, by my knowledge, there are at least five other people who could defeat you while in Ethereal Opening."

Zhou Ziheng looked into his eyes and knew that this was not a lie. His sense of defeat grew even worse and his expression became as vacant as a fool's.

Chen Changsheng paid him no more attention. Turning around, he walked back to the Orthodox Academy's gate.

Seeing his back, many cries arose from the crowd. Some of them were asking him to say something while others were asking him to directly give the names of those five people. All currently on the street had come to see the excitement, so excitement was naturally what they loved the most. Upon hearing the final exchange between Chen Changsheng and Zhou Ziheng, it was a matter of course that they would thirst to know just which Ethereal Opening geniuses in Chen Changsheng's eyes could perform a similar feat, surpassing cultivation levels and defeating a Star Condensation expert.

Chen Changsheng did not answer their cries. Under the guard of the Li Palace priests, he passed through the crowd and returned to the Orthodox Academy's gate.

A carriage was already at the ready in front of the gate, Xuanyuan Po at the reins.

The carriage made its way through Hundred Flowers Lane and passed through the crowd, arriving on the street.

The crowd gazed at the carriage with great interest. The Orthodox Academy had just obtained victory in its first battle, but now they were going out? Where did they want to go?

The Orthodox Academy's carriage traveled along the street, but when it passed by the awning, it came to an abrupt halt.

The curtain of the carriage window was opened, revealing Tang Thirty-Six's face. This immediately attracted the cheerful cries of quite a few young ladies.

Tang Thirty-Six flashed a smile at those girls, then shifted his gaze to those people under the awning. "Yesterday you used six hours to set up this old awning. What a waste of time."

The awning had been erected to watch a show, but the time it took for this show to run its course had been much less than the time it had taken to erect this awning.

It was very ridiculous.

Tang Thirty-Six did not like these people that had come to watch this show, so he had made Xuanyuan Po deliberately stop the carriage here so he could laugh at them.

The many powerful figures under the awning had rather unsightly complexions, but the stewards of the Four Great Markets were unmoved.

Tang Thirty-Six drew the curtain back down and then gazed at the dagger at Chen Changsheng's waist. "Stainless, this name's not bad."

Back then at the Plum Garden Inn, he had wanted to take a look at this sword but he had been stopped by Chen Changsheng. He had always been rather upset by this.

Today, he finally roughly understood the reason.

Chen Changsheng was rather unsure about his naming skill, so asked, "Is it really not bad?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "The sword is like the person. It's really not bad."

Chen Changsheng gave a faint smile and was prepared to say a joke, like how the person was like this sword.

Although easily beating Zhou Ziheng was within his expectations, to finally conclude this matter was worthy of being

happy over and he was very happy at the moment.

Just at this moment, his gaze fell over a gap in the curtain that had been raised up by the wind, and onto a certain place in the crowd on the side of the street.

A man stood there, his posture abnormally tall and straight. His expression was tranquil and indifferent, but his temples still had a few grains of dust, as if he had just ended an extremely long journey.

Chen Changsheng did not know who this person was. He just felt like this person was similar to the longsword at the man's side: extremely calm and extremely dangerous.

Chapter 446 - Where Is The Carriage Going?

Merely by glancing at that person in the crowd, Chen Changsheng's eyes grew somewhat sore. Only after the wind blew past and the curtain's descent cut off his line of sight did he no longer feel so uncomfortable.

It was a very powerful sword intent. In these past few months, Chen Changsheng had encountered many experts. In the Garden of Zhou, he had joined hearts with ten thousand swords, and then he had joined together with Su Li on the journey south. His sense for the keenness of sword intent had long surpassed that of the average person. He could sense that although this person's sword intent did not match up to that of a powerful figure in the Divine Domain like Zhu Luo, it was still extremely frightening. Even more frightening was that this person's sword intent also contained a killing intent. That killing intent was not concealed at all and was targeted at him.

"Who is that?" he asked.

Tang Thirty-Six had noticed his strange appearance just a few moments ago. Lifting a corner of the curtain and looking over, he very naturally discovered the figure of that man. His expression immediately grew very solemn as he declared, "He is Guan Bai."

Chen Changsheng had heard this name before. After a moment's silence, he asked, "Is it that Guan Bai from the Heavenly Dao Academy?"

"Correct." Tang Thirty-Six lowered the curtain and turned his head to Chen Changsheng. "After completing his education at the Heavenly Dao Academy, he has always been out traveling. I didn't think that he would return to the capital all of a sudden. You should be keenly aware why he returned."

Chen Changsheng asked, "He had a good relationship with Zhuang Huanyu?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Zhuang Huanyu was not willing to receive his own father's support. After entering the capital, Principal Zhuang entrusted him to Guan Bai's care for a year. The two could be considered brothers."

Chen Changsheng was speechless. At present, everyone believed that he had forced Zhuang Huanyu to death. If Guan Bai really did regard Zhuang Huanyu as his own brother, then it was only a matter of course that he would come to take vengeance.

"He probably won't use the Ivy All-School Martial Exhibition's name to challenge you." Tang Thirty-Six saw the expression on his face and added, "After all, he's an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation. He won't be as shameless as Zhou Ziheng."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then what method do you think he will use?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "If my calculations are not wrong, he will give you one year of time."

Chen Changsheng did not understand the meaning of these words.

Tang Thirty-Six explained, "Next year there will be a Boiling Stone Summit. At that time, he will take the stage and kill you. His Holiness will be powerless. Even if an explanation is demanded after the fact, at most, he will only have to return his life to the Li Palace."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say. The sword intent that he had previously sensed already told him that Tang Thirty-Six's conjecture was most likely correct.

Tang Thirty-Six empathized with him. For an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation to vow to take one's life at the cost of even his own, anyone would be extremely miserable. Moreover, this sort of situation would persist for a year.

It was impossible for him to imagine just how he could possibly endure this one year if this matter concerned him instead.

But it was beyond his imagination that Chen Changsheng was already extremely experienced with bearing this sort of pressure, with confronting this sort of shadow. Thus, it only took a few moments for his expression to return to normal.

Tang Thirty-Six was rather taken aback at this change of expression. He was afraid that Chen Changsheng was pretending to be calm, so he decided to change the subject.

"Let's not talk about it anymore." He asked Chen Changsheng in a serious tone, "You said to Zhou Ziheng just a moment ago that there were at least five other people at Ethereal Opening that could defeat him. Who are these five people?"

There had been many listeners to this previous exchange and it was also a topic everyone viewed with the greatest interest.

"I know I'm definitely not one of them." Directly looking into Chen Changsheng's eyes, Tang Thirty-Six said in a very indifferent manner, "So you don't need to care about my feelings."

Chen Changsheng did not need to take too long to ponder this question. He straightforwardly said, "Qiushan Jun, Xu Yourong, Lady Chujian, Gou Hanshi, Nanke."

It was plainly obvious that this was a question he had considered many times.

In his view, besides him, these five people at the level of Ethereal Opening had the ability to defeat the Star Condensation expert Zhou Ziheng.

"Qiushan Jun, Xu Yourong, and Gou Hanshi should have the ability. As for that Demon Princess, I've only heard rumors about her. A few days ago, I heard you say that in the Garden of Zhou, she beat you black and blue, where living was worse than death. No matter how I see it, for her to handle Zhou Ziheng would be a simple affair for her. Only...who is Lady Chujian? How come I've never heard of her before?"

Tang Thirty-Six asked him with great curiosity.

The story of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun had only been completely divulged to Luoluo. He had never mentioned that genius elf girl to Tang Thirty-Six.

Now, upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's question, he didn't know how to answer. Thinking about how the status of that girl was still unknown made him lapse into an even deeper silence.

Tang Thirty-Six saw that his current emotional state was rather strange and ceased pursuing this line of questioning, thinking to find some other time to inquire about it. Instead, he asked, "Where are we going right now?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "To pick someone up."

Watching as the carriage galloped off into the distance, the crowd was abuzz with discussion. After just concluding a shocking battle that involved surpassing cultivation levels, just where were these youths of the Orthodox Academy in a rush to get to?

The personnel of the Four Great Markets responsible for construction went to inquire if they should begin taking apart the awning. Unexpectedly, they received a reply in the negative.

The Celestial Pole Market was the most powerful of the Four Great Markets and possessed the deepest backing. All gazes rested

upon the Grand Steward of this market.

The Grand Steward shot a glance at the nearby steward from the Heavenly Fragrance Market and said, "There will be many more matches afterwards. This old awning, of course we have to keep it."

There were no objections because everyone understood.

The new rule of the Orthodoxy had already been promulgated. From tomorrow on, there would be many more people coming one after the other to challenge the Orthodox Academy.

Chen Changsheng's victory today was not at all indicative of a conclusion. On the contrary, this was only the beginning.

Many matters of the secular world were like this. Whether in life or work, how could there possibly be such an easy way to bring things to a close? The vast majority of cases required dull and dry repetition.

For instance, the two officials from the Department for Purging Officials in that carriage on the other end of the street had just finished their report on today's battle and performed some initial analysis. Soon after, they still had to do their own jobs!

Just after the Orthodox Academy's carriage left, that carriage also began to move, following it from a distance.

The two carriages, one in front and one behind, traveled through the streets of the capital.

Along the way, countless pieces of information from the agents and spies the Department for Purging Officials had spread throughout the capital were transmitted to the carriage behind.

Those two officials were also very curious to know just where the Orthodox Academy's carriage was going. Of course, besides curiosity, they absolutely had to know the tracks and destination of that carriage.

The Orthodox Academy did not take any sort of circuitous route, having no intention of concealing its tracks, so following it was very smooth.

But the complexions of the two officials in the carriage were growing increasingly solemn and the shock in their eyes was growing ever more evident.

It seemed to them that this route they were taking was very familiar.

Because every day when they woke up in the morning, they would always take this route to go to work.

If the Orthodox Academy continued on this route, it would reach a certain location.

That place was called Zhou Mansion, and it was also called Zhou Prison.

Of course, that place also had a more formal name: The office of the Great Zhou Dynasty's Department for Purging Officials.

Chapter 447 - The Remnants Of The Crabapple Blossoms Are Like Blood

(Author's note: Forgetting one of the four and a half people the Tang Old Master feared, and also just where did all the riches that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong plundered from the Garden of Zhou? I truly did forget. I'm really not sensitive enough to these sorts of things. I admit my mistake. In the future, I will be even more conscientious. In a few days when Xu Yourong returns to the capital, I will try and find them again. Believe that they will be found in an exceptionally beautiful manner. As I said a few days ago, the updates have been slower these past few days. This will continue until I think it's enough or I return to Daqing.)

The Department for Purging Officials was in the principal alley of the Northern Military Department.

Although it was called an alley, it was actually a very spacious and straight street, able to accommodate two carriages side by side.

At this time, there were two carriages in the alley, one in front and one behind. The carriages were already empty of people but there were quite a few people outside the alley. Moreover, as the news spread through the capital, it was certain that even more people would appear.

The people currently outside this alley were the spies and informants of the various powers of the capital. They only dared to stand at the opening of the alley and watch that mansion from a

distance, lacking the courage to get any closer.

The mansion was very unremarkable and didn't give off any sort of sinister feeling. However, the alley before the stone steps of the mansion was devoid of pedestrians.

Chen Changsheng stood before the gate of that mansion. He handed his name card over to an official, his expression and actions clearly somewhat stiff.

This was the first time he had offered his name card on a formal visit.

He had never done this sort of thing before, so it was inevitable for him to be a little nervous. Of course, the fundamental reason for this anxiety was because of the mansion itself. Not only was he breathing heavily, Xuanyuan Po was too. Even the normally heaven-defying Tang Thirty-Six was abnormally silent now—in fact, when the carriage had passed through the stone arch on the main street and entered the Northern Military Department's principal alley, finally confirming Chen Changsheng's destination, Tang Thirty-Six had ceased to speak.

This mansion was the office of the Department for Purging Officials and also Zhou Tong's residence, as well as the legendary Zhou Prison.

To many people, especially the subjects of the Great Zhou Dynasty, this mansion was the most sinister location in the continent, even more terrifying than Xuelao City in the land of

demons.

Because Xuelao City was too far away, while Zhou Prison was close by.

The reason for this mansion's sinister and terrifying aura was naturally the powerful figure that resided within.

The name of Zhou Tong could silence the cries of a child in the night. This was not merely some literary allegory, but something that had really happened.

Besides this, there were still many similar stories. It was said that several decades ago, a certain son of an official of the Ministry of Rites had taken in too much wine at some brothel and wished to forcefully press himself upon a famous hostess. Just as he was about to accomplish the deed, he heard a person outside the door yell "Zhou Tong is coming!" That official's son was so scared that he wet himself on the spot. From that point on, he never appeared publicly again.

Of course, this did not mean that Zhou Tong was willing to help the common people of the capital educate their children, nor did it mean that he was some good person that was willing to run to the rescue of damsels in distress. It only indicated just to what degree the fear of his name had reached in the hearts of the people.

It was known throughout the world that Zhou Tong was a cruel official of brutal methods, a vile man with a sinister and wicked character. It could not be counted how many innocent commoners

and firm, upright officials he had slaughtered.

If it could be said that many people wanted to kill Su Li because he had killed too many people with his sword, then it could be said that all the people of the world wanted to kill Zhou Tong. Even officials in the same factions would occasionally wish that he would just go and die. There were even times when some people thought that since the heavens had allowed someone like Zhou Tong to appear, it must be some sort of punishment against mankind.

Based on how these stories normally developed, a person like Zhou Tong would only be able to hold power for a short time. He should have long since been sentenced to death by a thousand cuts by some heroic lord, or else some capable expert that shunned the secular world should have turned him into a wisp of smoke. But none of this occurred.

Because he was a grand minister of the Great Zhou Dynasty with an extremely lofty position, guarded by countless soldiers and experts. Moreover, he was himself a Star Condensation expert. Crucially, he was the Divine Empress's most loyal dog.

The world held countless people who opposed the Tianhai Divine Empress's grasp of the government. Amongst them, roughly seventy percent did so because she was a woman. The remaining thirty percent opposed her fundamentally because Zhou Tong's actions were too evil. Because no one was a fool. Even the most idiot commoner, after so many years, could tell that Zhou Tong's wickedness and brutality was in fact the embodiment of the Divine Empress's will.

The Divine Empress's reign over the continent had actually already spanned two hundred years. Her methods of rule could be described as perfect, but there were still countless people who opposed her.

She was keenly aware that as a sovereign, it was impossible to appease everyone. Thus, she required a vicious dog, a sharp knife, to tear and chop at those who opposed her in the dark.

To speak on a deeper level, she required a person to implement her evil will.

This person was Zhou Tong.

He perfectly handled the Divine Empress's requests.

He was not shadowed by his childhood, and he wasn't interested in profit, nor did he ever do things unwillingly. He just loved to punish and imprison, to torture and abuse, in the name of the laws of the Great Zhou Dynasty!

From a certain point of view, Zhou Tong was actually a very pure person.

He was a purely evil person.

Today, Chen Changsheng had come to the office of the

Department for Purging Officials to meet with Zhou Tong.

From Xining Village to the capital, he had heard far too many things about Zhou Tong. It couldn't be helped that he was somewhat nervous. Only after holding that object in his sleeve was he able to calm down a little.

He was escorted into the mansion by an official of the Department for Purging Officials. He had not imagined that this incomparably terrifying mansion of rumor was actually so quiet and beautiful.

They were brought to the deepest courtyard.

The courtyard was not large, and planted in it were two crabapple trees. The trees were most likely rather old, since their branches already extended over the courtyard's wall. The remnants of pink blossoms could still be seen on them.

Xuanyuan Po turned his head, nervously taking the measure of his surroundings.

Tang Thirty-Six raised his eyebrows, thinking about something.

On the other hand, Chen Changsheng was recalling the buildings and environment he had seen on their way here, attempting to calculate where Zhexiu might be imprisoned.

He was currently at the peak of Ethereal Opening. If he were

placed in the ordinary sects and monasteries of the world, he could be considered an expert. Although he hadn't developed a connection with the heavens and the earth, he still had some intuition in this aspect, especially after he had followed Su Li in learning the Intellectual Sword. However, it was obvious that this seemingly ordinary mansion had a sort of spell array that far surpassed his cultivation. The more he thought, the more he realized that he couldn't even completely recall the route they took in, let alone the location where Zhexiu was imprisoned.

At this moment, a voice rang out.

"An Ethereal Opening surpassing cultivation levels to defeat a Star Condensation...this is the first time this has occurred in the past decade, and so will inevitably shock the entire continent. For you at this time, full of spirit and brimming with sword intent, to take a carriage and drive directly to the Northern Military Department's principal alley, according to the art of war, is truly excellent. To take a single horse and crash it through a barrier— isn't that one of the strategies of troop movement? Only, I have never heard that you were skilled in these sorts of things. Now that I think of it, it must be Su Li that taught you."

That voice was very serene and very ordinary, but for some reason, the moment they heard this voice, Chen Changsheng and the others suddenly felt like a sea of blood had appeared before them.

There were countless women and children within the sea of blood, wailing in despair as they slowly sank into oblivion.

Chen Changsheng knew that this was a fantasy and so was not nervous, even though he didn't understand why Zhou Tong had created this scene for them to see.

With the slightest movement of his spiritual sense, like a wisp of cool breeze, he woke up. He directed his gaze to the middle-aged man that had suddenly appeared in the courtyard.

Naturally, the middle-aged man was Zhou Tong.

His face was pale, as if he had not seen the sun for many years. His expression was calm, like that of some teacher of a country house. His two lips were extremely thin, making him seem exceptionally callous.

He wore the gown of an official, but he did not give off any of the prestige of an official. He only reeked of blood.

Chapter 448 - I Came To Pick Somebody Up

A deathly stillness hung over the small courtyard.

Chen Changsheng had met Zhou Tong before, and not only once.

However, this was his first real meeting with Zhou Tong.

His first meeting with the real Zhou Tong.

He gazed at Zhou Tong's pale cheeks, his lips that were as thin as knives, his official's gown that was crimson as blood, and he sensed an unimaginably frightening Qi. He felt like the scent of blood was growingly increasingly thick, as if it was real.

Finally, his gaze fell upon Zhou Tong's hands.

Those two hands were very slender, the fingernails trimmed flawlessly. They weren't dirty in the slightest, much less stained with blood.

But he knew that these two hands had slaughtered countless members of the Chen Imperial clan as well as many of their loyal officials. And just who knew how many eyes he had plucked and hearts he had dug out from still-living bodies?

Chen Changsheng felt like his heart was beating ever faster, and then an idea suddenly occurred to him: Zhou Tong's hands were

very suitable for holding a sword.

Consequently, he replied, "Senior Su Li taught me the sword on the road."

Swords were used to kill people. Words that were like swords were meant to break the influence of one's opponent.

Chen Changsheng did not understand this concept, but he had very naturally been able to form a response.

Those things Su Li had taught him on their journey south had always remained with him and were endlessly showing their use.

Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po awoke from their trances and revealed wary expressions.

Zhou Tong smiled in silence.

The remaining blossoms on the crabapple tree drifted to the ground. Some of the petals fell onto Chen Changsheng's shoulder.

The sinister pressure pervading the small courtyard instantly vanished, and that intense stench of blood also disappeared. Only the faint scent of flowers was left behind.

No one said anything.

After a moment, Zhou Tong looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "To not greet this official is to be rude."

There was a period of silence as Chen Changsheng thought of how to respond to this. Suddenly, the silent Tang Thirty-Six opened his mouth and asked, "What is your identity, what is your status?"

As he asked this question, he stared into Zhou Tong's eyes, stared into them like he was staring at a dangerously venomous snake.

Zhou Tong narrowed his eyes. He had not imagined that this young master of the Tang clan would have the courage to question, nor that he would be...so rude.

Without waiting for an answer, Tang Thirty-Six continued, "Chen Changsheng is the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. In terms of identity, in the Orthodoxy, he is only below His Holiness. And Your Excellency is only the supervisor of the office of the Department for Purging Officials. Even if the Divine Empress was even more gracious and kind and bestowed upon Your Excellency the title of Duke of the Third Rank, just how could Your Excellency be discussed on equal terms with my principal? In terms of greetings, it should naturally be Your Excellency that comes first."

Zhou Tong gazed at Tang Thirty-Six and revealed a false smile. "Even your father would not dare speak like this to me."

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "So my grandfather said, my father is inferior to me."

Zhou Tong replied, "If this is the case, then should it really be me that offers greetings first?"

Tang Thirty-Six's expression did not change. There was no contempt, no pride, no gloating, only extreme calm and focus as he replied, "Of course."

Zhou Tong's eyebrows perked up as he replied, "If this is the case, it should be you first."

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "I and Xuanyuan are students, just accompanying."

Zhou Tong asked, "Who are you accompanying?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "We are accompanying the Principal."

"I am the Principal." Chen Changsheng finally caught up to the tempo between these two. He very formally introduced himself: "I am the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng."

Zhou Tong said nothing for a very long time, and then he gently tidied his official robe.

His red official's gown, amongst the remnants of the crabapple blossoms, was particularly striking.

And then he clasped his hands, bowed, and asked for his purpose.

"I did not know that Principal Chen would come today. What does Sir require?"

"Wofu Zhexiu is a student of the Orthodox Academy."

Chen Changsheng looked intently at him and said, "I have come to pick him up."

The small courtyard was peaceful and serene, and while the office of the Department for Purging Officials was still heavily-guarded, countless people had already arrived outside the alley of the Northern Military Department.

All of the capital was in a tense mood.

Everyone knew why Chen Changsheng had come today to visit Zhou Tong.

But it was probably beyond their expectations that Chen Changsheng would so calmly and naturally bring up his demand.

This was because he had already affirmed his identity. He was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. Zhexiu was a student of the Orthodox Academy. A principal must be concerned about his students—this was an unalterable truth.

It was so unalterable that even Zhou Tong sighed as he thought to himself, just how much did that freak Su Li teach this kid?

Then he smiled and replied, "In accordance with the demands of the Imperial Court, I imprisoned Zhexiu. If his release is desired, Principal Chen requires the decree of the Divine Empress, or else a verdict from the Grand Court of Revision and the Ministry of Justice."

With the advent of the Department for Purging Officials, the Grand Court of Revision and the Ministry of Justice had become decorations, or perhaps subordinates, of the Department for Purging Officials.

Until Zhou Tong gave the nod, the Grand Court of Revision and the Ministry of Justice could not even take a case.

"I've studied the Daoist Canon since I was little," Chen Changsheng abruptly mentioned.

Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po shot him a glance, wondering, just why did you mention this now?

Zhou Tong knew that he still had more to say and waited in silence.

Chen Changsheng continued, "I've confirmed that Your Excellency directly took the case of the Garden of Zhou from the Li Palace. The Ministry of Justice and the Grand Court of Revision

don't even have this case on record."

Zhou Tong replied, "And what of it?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "Being well-versed in the Daoist Canon, I've also memorized all the laws of the Great Zhou. I'm very sure that there does not exist a single law supporting Your Excellency's continued imprisonment of Wofu Zhexiu."

Zhou Tong smiled at him, not saying a word.

Chen Changsheng said, "I ask that Your Excellency release him."

Zhou Tong removed a snow-white handkerchief from his sleeve and gently wiped the corner of his lips. His actions were very graceful, but his words were filled with scorn.

"Our future Pope is actually so lacking in patience. This can't help but cause people to be concerned about the Orthodoxy's future."

Perhaps because of Zhou Tong's actions, or perhaps because of those words, Tang Thirty-Six creased his brow.

"I promised His Eminence that I would wait two more days, but..." After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng continued, "He died, so I no longer need to wait."

Zhou Tong gazed at him and calmly replied, "I believe you have

forgotten one thing. Zhexiu is accused of colluding with the demons. As long as I have this accusation, I can keep him imprisoned however long I desire."

"Your Excellency also seems to have forgotten one thing. The three people accused of colluding with the demons in the Garden of Zhou were Zhexiu, Qi Jian...and me."

Chen Changsheng solemnly gazed back at him and declared, "If Your Excellency truly believes that Zhexiu could collude with the demons, then the first thing Your Excellency needs to do is to imprison me as well. If not, then you should release him."

The small courtyard became incomparably silent, and could even be described as a deathly silence.

Only the sounds of falling petals and breathing could be heard.

This was the choice he had left for Zhou Tong: release Zhexiu or imprison them together.

Zhou Tong slowly narrowed his eyes until they became as slender as willow leaves, and also very similar to the willow leaf blade that he was most skilled at.

His voice that fluttered out of his thin lips was similar too, though much colder.

"You...are you threatening this official?"

Chapter 449 - How Could The Chirping Of Cicadas Possibly Be Quiet?

Not all kinds of milk tasted good, and not all people would be so frightened by Zhou Tong's words that they would be like cicadas in the winter. For instance, in this world, there were some young people that would not be afraid.

If it were Gou Hanshi hearing Zhou Tong's words filled with murderous intent, he would presumably very warmly reply, "Your Excellency has misunderstood, I only wish to help Your Excellency resolve this problem." If Qiushan Jun were to hear those words, he would probably laugh and say, "Yes, Your Excellency has not got it wrong. I am precisely threatening Your Excellency." If Tang Thirty-Six were to act in this situation as he usually did, he would most likely answer the problem confronting him like so: "Idiot, I am threatening you, so what are you going to do about it?"

Somewhat regretfully, and somewhat fortunately, Zhou Tong's words were directed at Chen Changsheng, not Tang Thirty-Six.

Chen Changsheng's answer conformed very well with his personality. He stood at his original position and looked into Zhou Tong's eyes. There was no intention to inflame the conflict, but there was also no sense that he would retreat.

The cold Qi under the crabapple trees gradually vanished. Zhou Tong looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "If I do not see wrong, from the moment you entered the Northern Military Department, you have been very nervous."

Chen Changsheng thought about it and decided that this was nothing to be ashamed of, nor was there any need to conceal it, so he answered, "Yes."

Zhou Tong continued, "But you still came."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yes."

Zhou Tong said, "Then you should have thought of what to do if I did not release Zhexiu."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yes."

Zhou Tong perked his eyebrows and said with considerable interest, "I would really like to know just what you are prepared to do."

After a very long time, Chen Changsheng finally made a decision. He looked at Zhou Tong and sincerely declared, "If Your Excellency does not release him, then I am prepared to wrest him away."

The small courtyard once again became silent as a grave.

The petals of the crabapple blossoms gently drifted down.

Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po turned to Chen Changsheng. It was a mystery what they were thinking, and it was unknown

whether or not great waves were raging in their minds. At the very least, nothing could be made out on their faces.

Zhou Tong was also gazing at Chen Changsheng, but now he was looking at him very attentively.

Chen Changsheng eyes were very clear and very calm, so it was very easy to see what he was thinking, even his deepest thoughts.

Zhou Tong's gazed at him very seriously, so he could easily tell: Chen Changsheng was serious.

His words had not been a joke.

If Zhexiu was not able to walk out of Zhou Prison today, he would truly take action to forcefully wrest him away.

The problem was that this was innately a joke.

Zhou Tong began to laugh, then shook his head.

This was the Zhou Mansion, the Zhou Courtyard, the Zhou Prison.

This was the most heavily-guarded location in the Great Zhou Dynasty, not even losing out to the Imperial Palace.

In the tranquil and beautiful area around this house, who knew how many experts were concealed? There was also a massive military force of the Imperial Court standing guard in the surrounding streets and alleys.

Even Wang Po of Tianliang would find it impossible to steal someone away from this place, let alone their group.

Yes, these three young people were all cultivating geniuses, blessed with talent, but they were ultimately still young. At least for now, they still lacked the strength to resist the world.

There wasn't even a need for those hidden experts of the Imperial Court to emerge. Only Zhou Tong was required, and with only a single wave of a finger, Chen Changsheng and the others would find it impossible to leave this small courtyard.

Zhou Tong paid them no more attention. Clasping his hands behind his back, he began walking towards the northern wing of the small courtyard.

In the gentle rain of withered petals, his red robe was still striking, even dazzling.

In Chen Changsheng's eyes, this crimson official's gown was just like that sea of blood that had previously flooded the world.

Zhou Tong had turned his back to him. This sort of disregard would be felt by many people to be a humiliation, but this sort of

action would only make him more cool-headed.

It was plainly obvious that Zhou Tong simply did not care whether or not he acted, and perhaps even didn't believe that he would act.

Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po looked at him, waiting for his decision.

From the start to end, from the Orthodox Academy to the office of the Department for Purging Officials, they had not communicated, but they had never once hesitated or wavered.

Chen Changsheng wanted to come to the office of the Department for Purging Officials and so they had followed. Chen Changsheng wanted to meet Zhou Tong, so they had come to the meeting with him.

Now if Chen Changsheng said he wanted to act, they would naturally act with him.

"Your Excellency, please hold on."

Chen Changsheng's voice finally rang out.

Simultaneously, his hand gripped the hilt of his sword.

The sword was called Stainless, truly like the person.

Tang Thirty-Six took a deep breath and began to circulate his true essence. His right hand gripped the hilt of the Wenshui Sword while his left hand gripped a magical artifact hidden in his sleeve.

Xuanyuan Po looked all around for a suitable weapon. His eyes finally rested on the crabapple tree to his left. He thought to himself, it's a little thin, but it can be used just like this.

Zhou Tong halted his steps, but he did not turn around.

His red official's gown gently swayed in the wind. An ocean that reeked of blood instantly enveloped the entire courtyard, eerie and terrifying to the extreme.

Rumble!

Thunder crashed.

It wasn't from anyone in the courtyard taking action, but the stamping of hooves like peals of thunder coming from outside. Even the ground itself was shaking a little.

This was closely followed by the nervous cries of the officials of the Department for Purging Officials.

What had come was...the cavalry of the Orthodoxy!

"You cannot move the Orthodoxy's cavalry."

Zhou Tong turned his body, looking at Chen Changsheng as if he was deep in thought.

In the capital, there were few matters that could hide themselves from his eyes. From the moment the Northern Military Department's alley became a possible destination for the Orthodox Academy's carriage, countless related pieces of intelligence were sent to this location. He was keenly aware that Chen Changsheng had not prepared anything in the background. He was relying purely on the manner and sword intent he had gained from obtaining victory over Zhou Ziheng to break into this place.

"It has nothing to do with me."

Chen Changsheng truly could not move the Orthodoxy's cavalry.

The Orthodoxy's cavalry were under the direct command of the Li Palace and were extremely powerful in battle.

Zhou Tong suddenly thought of a certain day last year. On that day, the entire capital besieged the Orthodox Academy and the people crowded around the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

And then, the cavalry of the Orthodoxy had arrived. Like an autumn wind sweeping up the leaves, they had firmly and callously cleared the scene.

On that day, a considerable amount of people had died.

It was also only from that day forward that many people finally understood that the archbishop of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, who seemed about to fall asleep at any time, actually possessed such high authority within the Orthodoxy and concealed such strength.

From the looks of it, the Orthodoxy cavalry that had just arrived should have been part of the legacy bequeathed upon Chen Changsheng by that recently deceased elder.

Zhou Tong said expressionlessly to Chen Changsheng, "You know what the result would be if you were to attack me."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I will die."

Zhou Tong said, "In my presence, even your thinking about death is not so easy."

Chen Changsheng replied, "No, I naturally have ways of dying."

For some reason, Zhou Tong was rather incensed at these words. "Then why don't you just go and die?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "Your Excellency has still not moved. Presumably, it is out of fear that we really will die."

Zhou Tong sneered, "What am I so frightened of?"

"Previously, Your Excellency said that I was threatening you. You should be keenly aware that if I were to threaten you, this would be my only method."

Chen Changsheng continued, "I place my life on the line and then see whether, in the eyes of those powerful figures, it is my life that is important or Your Excellency's."

As it was the beginning of summer, as the sun gradually approached its apex, the quiet and beautiful courtyard became rather stuffy.

From some place far away came the chirping of cicadas, their song somewhat vexing to the mind.

Just like Zhou Tong's mood.

When he learned that Prince Chen Liu and Mao Qiuyu had arrived outside, his vexation reached its peak.

Chapter 450 - The Small Ones Beneath The Crimson Official's Gown

Today, the capital was exceptionally bustling.

Not too long after early morning, the battle took place before the gates of the Orthodox Academy and Chen Changsheng surpassed cultivation levels to obtain victory over Zhou Ziheng.

This matter was already enough to astound the world.

But no one could have imagined that he would go on to do something that was even more world-shaking.

He brought the remaining two students of the Orthodox Academy, boarded a carriage, and rushed into the Zhou Prison. It was said that he was currently within, in stalemate with that frightening Lord Zhou Tong.

The Orthodox Academy wanted a person.

Zhou Tong would not release him.

After learning this news, the populace of the capital rushed over to see the excitement, but it was a different sort of excitement compared to the battle from this morning. There was far too much evil around Zhou Prison and its image was far too gruesome in the eyes of the populace, so the crowd did not dare get too close.

So when the five hundred cavalry of the Orthodoxy roared through the street, there were no accidental injuries.

Soon after, a chief eunuch from the Imperial Palace arrived, the Vice Minister arrived, and Mao Qiuyu came to the scene. Lastly, the county prince's carriage hurried over to the scene.

No one entered Zhou Prison or even the alley which contained it.

Prince Chen Liu descended from his carriage and glanced at the five hundred Orthodoxy cavalry. He almost imperceptibly creased his brow, then gave a bitter smile to Mao Qiuyu, saying, "This matter has made too much of a ruckus."

Today's matter truly had caused too much of a ruckus. Everyone knew that the Orthodoxy's new rule concerning the All-School Martial Exhibition was nothing more than the Imperial Court—or to be more precise, the Tianhai Clan and the two archbishops that were loyal to the Divine Empress—pressuring the Orthodox Academy. But no one had imagined that the Orthodox Academy's response to this would be so intense and so swift. Right after obtaining victory in their first battle, they had gone without the slightest delay to Zhou Prison to demand a person's release!

The once-principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Mao Qiuyu, now the Sacred Hall Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, stood amongst the ranks of the Six Prefects.

His appearance assuredly signified the attitude of the Li Palace.

The problem was that even such a powerful figure as he stood outside the alley, not going in.

Everyone knew that the relationship between the Divine Empress and the Li Palace had undergone a great change within the past year. They were gradually growing apart, but they still maintained peace on the surface.

Since these two Saints were presently maintaining their silence, no one wanted or dared to make this situation even more fraught with tension and make it spiral out of control. No one was willing to bear the frightening consequences of such an act.

Until the Orthodox Academy's carriage entered this alley.

If today, some mishap really did happen in that small courtyard, then the capital, the continent, and even the entire human world would be plunged into a great mishap.

Within the courtyard, Tang Thirty-Six looked at Zhou Tong very seriously, even sincerely. "Your Excellency, I must speak the truth to you. Chen Changsheng, his life...is truly very good, and could be said to be precious beyond description. I do not know how the Divine Empress sees it, but in the eyes of His Holiness, Your Excellency's life is inevitably not as precious as Chen Changsheng's life. If he were to really die today in Zhou Prison, do you believe His Holiness would spare Your Excellency? And how would the Empress view your Excellency?"

"Precious beyond description?" Zhou Tong narrowed his eyes at

Chen Changsheng, seeming to ruminate over something.

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "And Your Excellency perhaps does not understand him. At times, he really can be very stubborn, very foolish. He really could do something like exchanging his life for Zhexiu's."

"No matter how you say it, it's still threatening me." Zhou Tong was deeply emotional. "Is it maybe because there have been less stories about me in the capital lately so that no one is afraid of me anymore?"

Tang Thirty-Six smiled. "Your Excellency can think what he wants."

Zhou Tong coldly yelled, "Can you bear the consequences of this matter?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "It was not me that wanted to become Principal of the Orthodox Academy, so I don't believe I need to bear the consequences."

The meaning of these words was exceptionally clear.

He was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy and Zhexiu was a student on the registers of the Orthodox Academy. Zhexiu had been imprisoned in Zhou Prison for too long, so it was only natural that he rescue Zhexiu from this prison. As for the deeper implications hidden behind this matter, he really couldn't

comprehend them, nor did he want to comprehend them. Thus, he only needed to bear the consequences that a principal shielding his student should bear. As for whatever serious consequences this matter would attract, it should be the joint responsibility of that person that made him Principal of the Orthodox Academy and the person that ordered Zhou Tong to imprison Zhexiu.

In other words, if a storm really was stirred up in this small courtyard and the relationship between the Li Palace and the Imperial Court became like that of fire and water, then even if the world fell into complete chaos, the demons seized the chance to invade, the populace became destitute and homeless, and all of humanity became enslaved for tens of thousands of years...it was the fault of the Pope and the Divine Empress.

The courtyard once more became incomparably silent.

Zhou Tong had not imagined that Chen Changsheng would have this sort of intention. He narrowed his eyes and the temperature suddenly dropped. A layer of frost suddenly formed over the petals on the ground.

Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po gazed at Chen Changsheng, wanting to sigh with admiration.

The Li Palace, the Great Hall of Light.

Countless sculptures of sages, some solemn, some hallowed, emitted a faint radiance as they gazed at the sky above the hall.

The Pope was also gazing at the sky, his expression calm. It was as if he had not just heard about what Chen Changsheng had done and said.

"How can a person like Chen Changsheng, who is ignorant of the general situation, who cannot grasp the bigger picture, inherit the Orthodoxy?"

The speaker was Daoist Siyuan, master of the Hall of Subjugation. He stood at the side of Linghai Zhiwang, master of the Hall of Heavenly Judgment.

As the youngest of the Six Prefects and simultaneously the most powerful of the Sacred Hall Archbishops, they were still reverential to the Pope, but they spoke very directly.

Perhaps it was also because they were only a step from the Divine Domain and could already see the back of the Pope.

At present, the entire continent believed that these two archbishops continued to support the Divine Empress and were unwilling to stand at the side of the Pope because they had an unquenchable hostility and distrust for the Chen Imperial clan. However, no one had imagined that, besides this, the more important reason was that the Pope had decided to entrust the future of the Orthodoxy to this young person called Chen Changsheng.

The two Sacred Hall Archbishops could disregard the authority of the secular world, but it was impossible for them to not care

about the inheritance of the divine.

Linghai Zhiwang expressionlessly said, "It was written very clearly by the Holy Maiden in her letter, that matter really has a hope of success. This signifies that the pressure placed on Mount Li was reasonable. Zhou Tong has achieved some merit on this matter."

The Pope said nothing, as serene as ever.

Daoist Siyuan sighed, saying, "Your Holiness should be keenly aware, our positions on the ownership of the Divine Staff or the emperor's throne are not because we oppose Your Holiness. Our unease comes from the fact that Your Holiness and the Empress still have at least several decades' worth of life essence. What need is there for Your Holiness to make a decision so quickly?"

This decision was still about ownership.

The ownership of the Divine Staff and the emperor's throne.

Linghai Zhiwang's face was still emotionless, but his voice was like the deepest depths of the ocean, containing an unimaginable might. "As for Zhou Tong, just kill him. All of his crimes are his own to bear. He should have been keenly aware long ago just what his mission is."

Just a moment ago, he had said that Zhou Tong had achieved great merit.

Now, he was saying that if a problem occurred in that small courtyard, it was fine to just kill Zhou Tong.

In the next moment, a worried and panicked voice came from outside the Great Hall of Light.

Something had occurred in the Northern Military Department alley that exceeded everyone's expectations.

Zhou Tong had actually released Zhexiu!

Chapter 451 - The Youth And [Time](#)

(The Chinese term for time used here, rather than the typical 时间, is the term 光阴, which literally translates to 'light and shadow'. It can also be thought of as the passage of time, day and night.)

In the Great Hall of Light, the archbishops were thinking of a massacre in the darkness—to resolve the conflict triggered by the youths of the Orthodox Academy, to give all sides an acceptable resolution, if the Pope no longer protected Chen Changsheng, then it was certainly acceptable that Zhou Tong be killed.

However, Zhou Tong was no ordinary individual. Just when everyone believed that the situation in the courtyard of drifting crabapple blossoms had reached an impasse, he was still not willing to accept a conclusion decided by others. He gave the world a conclusion that no one had expected.

The Pope turned his gaze away from the sky and turned to Linghai Zhiwang, the faintest of smiles on his lips.

Linghai Zhiwang's voice suddenly cracked, just like the dark waters of the ocean instantly shattering into countless bubbles of white foam.

"Just what is he planning on doing?"

"Many years ago, my older sister was...raped and murdered by a son of a prince's family. Yes, it was not the heir nor was he a particularly spoiled son. He was just a very ordinary son of a concubine. I'm even willing to wager that the prince didn't even know he had such a son, because this prince was just like a pig, giving birth to over forty sons and a pile of daughters. Anyway, in brief...they all had the surname 'Chen'."

Zhou Tong looked at Chen Changsheng, his eyes extremely cold, but with a strand of brutal remembrance deep within. "The Imperial Court could not possibly care about such a small affair, and how could the capital government and the military department dare trespass into a prince's mansion to seize someone? As a result, this matter was gradually forgotten by others. In the end, only I was left to remember just how hard the rain fell that day, how many wounds the beast had bitten into my sister's body...yes, it was very difficult to forget. If you were me, what would you do?"

The crabapple blossoms that had fallen to the ground seemed like a mantle of snowflakes on the ground of the small courtyard, but within these snowflakes was a tinge of blood.

Chen Changsheng and the others did not know why he would mention this thing of the past, much less how to respond.

"Of course, you've got to kill them," Zhou Tong calmly answered. "In order to kill this son of a prince—yes, back then, I wasn't thinking about killing that prince together with him—I prepared to wait for a very long time, prepared to exchange my life for a brief moment of joy. However, just when I was prepared to plunge

into the prince's mansion, I was prevented from doing so by a person. That person was the Empress."

He turned his gaze towards the Imperial Palace, his eyes filled with strange and complex emotions. After a seemingly endless span of silence, he continued to mumble, "The Empress said to me, the mark of an immature man is that he is willing to go out in a blaze of glory for some reason, while the mark of a mature man is that he is willing to patiently endure for some reason!"

Zhou Tong drew back his gaze and turned to Chen Changsheng. Calmly and seriously, he asked, "Do you understand?"

Chen Changsheng very earnestly pondered this, then he shook his head and replied, "I understand, but I cannot do it."

Zhou Tong began to chuckle. "Who can do it? I didn't agree at all with the Empress's argument, so I still took out my blade and rushed off to the prince's mansion. Fortunately, the Empress, using only a fingertip, was able to knock me unconscious."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "And then?"

Zhou Tong replied, "And then I naturally understood, thus I began to endure, endure for a very long time."

Tang Thirty-Six thought about that bloody affair in the capital that had shaken the entire continent. He had some suspicions, but he didn't dare to confirm them. He asked, "Finally?"

"Finally, it's only natural that I killed that person, and as for that prince, he naturally...died by a thousand cuts. Of course, I killed everyone from that prince's family. Those forty-plus sons and that pile of daughters...although they were born as quickly as pigs, how could I possibly kill them as quickly? The Empress had truly spoken correctly. By living a modest and even lowly life for a few more years, I was ultimately able to succeed at my objective."

Zhou Tong began to laugh like a child. It was delighted and innocent, and thus felt extremely cruel.

Xuanyuan Po gaped, not knowing what to say. He felt like the small courtyard had abruptly turned cold.

Tang Thirty-Six confirmed that it truly was that incident where the Prince of Qishan's entire family was executed down to the third generation, but he said nothing.

Chen Changsheng suddenly declared, "I think that the you of the past preparing to rush into the prince's mansion with a dagger was better than the you of the future."

As he said this, he very sincerely looked into Zhou Tong's eyes.

Zhou Tong asked, "Even if I was immature, and even somewhat foolish?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "There are some things, there are

some times, where being immature is actually better."

Zhou Tong fell into silence. Only after a good while did he suddenly begin to laugh.

He turned around and began to walk towards the back of the courtyard. He flicked the two sleeves of his great red official's gown, raising up a red-white petal.

The side of the courtyard opened with a creak. Several officials of the Department for Purging Officials walked out, carrying with them a stretcher.

Zhexiu lay on this stretcher, his face pale and his eyes shut.

To take Zhexiu and imprison him in Zhou Prison, keeping him in there for so many days, Zhou Tong had turned a blind eye to the Li Palace and Star Seizer Academy, no matter how much pressure they had placed upon him. This was because Zhexiu's imprisonment was the will of the Divine Empress and it increased the pressure on Mount Li.

Just like he had said to Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu being imprisoned within Zhou Prison signified that the matter of the Garden of Zhou had not yet come to a close. The Mount Li Sword Sect, which had just pulled itself away from internal strife, would inevitably have to pay some sort of price for this matter. To the Great Zhou, this was naturally a great thing.

Of course, his unwillingness to release Zhexiu had a somewhat deeper reason which was impossible to explain to others. It was just like how no one, until that moment, had known that he had actually already prepared to release Zhexiu, only...

"Your Excellency, why did you agree to release him?" In the deepest and coldest room of the Department for Purging Officials, Priest Xin asked this question in confusion.

Who could have imagined that Priest Xin, Archbishop Mei Lisha's most trusted aide over these past few months, would actually appear in this place? Moreover, it was plain to see that his relationship with Zhou Tong was quite unusual. It was a mystery just what sort of person he was.

"Why not release him? The pressure placed on Mount Li should already be sufficient. I had originally wanted to see what sort of response the Li Palace would have, but it turns out His Holiness, that Saint, is truly beyond my ability to reckon. But at least I was able to see with my own eyes what sort of person he is."

Zhou Tong closed his eyes, recalling the scene of that clean youth under the crabapple trees.

Priest Xin thought to himself, Your Excellency's piece on the definition of maturity and immaturity was extremely reasonable and extremely difficult to answer. I originally thought that Chen Changsheng's answer touched Your Excellency's soul, causing you to agree to release him...

"Moved?" Zhou Tong seemed to have the ability to read minds. He opened his eyes and said emotionlessly, "This official has never had an older sister, what could that answer move? Whose answer could possess the ability to move me?"

Priest Xin shook his head, then said, "Before His Eminence passed away, he was always reading this book."

As he spoke, he extracted a scripture from his bosom and offered it.

Zhou Tong received it and realized that this was a famous scripture of the Orthodoxy, the 'Scroll of Time'.

As he gazed at this scripture, he thought of that youth under the crabapple tree. For what seemed like forever, he said nothing.

He had spoken the truth to Priest Xin.

He had always been unwilling to release Zhexiu because he wanted to, at this place, borrowing those two crabapple trees and the murderous atmosphere of Zhou Prison, carefully, seriously, from head to toe, from inside to outside, examine Chen Changsheng.

To him, this was a matter of most vital importance, more important than Zhexiu or the cold intention of those two archbishops to extinguish him.

Because he wanted to see a span of time on Chen Changsheng's body.

Chapter 452 - The Heavenly Dao Flows West

It was unknown whether Zhou Tong had managed to spy a span of time on Chen Changsheng's body, but he was currently gazing at the Scroll of Time in his hands.

The Scroll of Time was also called the 'Canon of Flowing West' and was one of the most important scriptures of the Orthodoxy. Simultaneously, it was also the most profound and abstruse classic of the Daoist Canon. 'The trend of the river moving west cannot be slowed' was the meaning of its name and it gave an account of subtle observations of the Dao concerning time. Before he died, Mei Lisha had not forgotten to read this Daoist scripture—What did this mean?

As Zhou Tong gazed at the cryptic and incomprehensible words of the Canon of Flowing West, he silently pondered this question.

Priest Xin continued to describe what had happened in that room filled with plum blossoms. "He said that Principal Shang truly is an extraordinary man."

Zhou Tong narrowed his eyes and his gaze abruptly turned cold and sharp. A person on the verge of death would speak the truth. An extraordinary priest like Mei Lisha had long since become indifferent to the thought of death. On the eve of his death, why did he read this Daoist scripture, why did he suddenly mention this man who had disappeared into hiding for many years?

Priest Xin paused for a moment, and then remembered the

archbishop's final emotional sigh. "He was very curious to see just how the Daoist Canon would record the life of the next Pope."

Zhou Tong's two eyebrows leapt up. There was no wind in the quiet room, but his red official's gown began to undulate as if the sea of blood had come to the world.

The outer appearance originated from one's mental state. This phenomenon indicated just how heavy the mental assault brought on by Priest Xin's account was—because from these words and this book, he had faintly been able to seize upon a clue.

The next Pope? The entire continent knew that if nothing too out of the ordinary occurred, the Orthodoxy's next Pope would inevitably be Chen Changsheng. Mei Lisha had been the staunchest promoter of this matter and so he would naturally not be thinking of anyone else. So then why was he curious about how Chen Changsheng's life would be recorded? Why did he think this matter was so interesting? Or was it because he believed that there would definitely be a different view expressed in the annals of history? And just what matter would it differ on? What was the most important thing in life? To contribute to a great cause or to cultivate and live a moral life?

Zhou Tong's official's robe blew around ever more fiercely and the room reeked with the stench of blood. The sea of blood surged with monstrous waves, just like his current emotional state.

Priest Xin's face was deathly pale. He was almost unable to bear this terrifying pressure, but he also didn't dare to retreat.

Suddenly, all the pressure vanished without a trace, and Zhou Tong's eyebrows slowly went flat. His gaze was no longer sharp and official's robe returned to quietly covering his body. On his face appeared an unfathomable smile.

"Do you know what the most important thing in a person's life is?"

"The most important?" Priest Xin did not understand why the lord would suddenly ask this sort of question.

The smile on Zhou Tong's face grew increasingly sincere, like a blooming flower. However, when paired with his sinister aura, it only made the whole picture increasingly bizarre.

"The most important thing in a person's life is not the level to which one has cultivated, nor is it power and the symbols of authority, but rather...the dates of birth and death." He walked to the door and looked out at those two crabapple trees, listening to the sounds of carriage wheels rumbling along in the distance. "Whether discussing the scriptures of the Orthodoxy or the annals of history, in order to record a person's life, the first thing that must be confirmed, and also the first words that must be written, are what year and month you were born, as well as the place of birth. Only by confirming these pieces of information can we confirm just which person is which."

Priest Xin walked behind, not knowing how to respond. He could vaguely sense that although Zhou Tong seemed very calm on the

surface, he was actually extremely nervous within.

What sort of words or matters could have occurred to cause such a terrifying figure as Zhou Tong to get nervous?

"The crabapple blossoms had already begun to wilt and the prison possessed a divine might. He stood between them, and yet he was unmoving as a lake."

Zhou Tong's eyes narrowed once more, except this time his gaze was not sharp like a sword. Rather, it was brimming with perplexity and a sort of unease that not even he was able to realize.

Priest Xin also wished to know: the lord had orchestrated such a large stage, but besides clearing up the motives of some powerful figures, was he able to succeed in his most important objective? Zhou Tong wanted to see what sort of person Chen Changsheng was, but it could also be said that he wanted to see what person Chen Changsheng was. But normally, the phrase was 'unmoving like a mountain', so why did he rate Chen Changsheng to be unmoving like a lake?

"He's very similar to a person." Zhou Tong's face suddenly revealed a smear of fear. "He's very similar to the man described in the secret records within the palace, Chen Xuanba."

Priest Xin was confused. In the annals and legends of the common folk, Chen Xuanba was the strongest expert of the Chen Imperial clan in the past one thousand years, on par with Emperor Taizong. He had always possessed a fierce and crude reputation, so

in what aspect was he the slightest bit like Chen Changsheng? And why did he have to say it was the Chen Xuanba of the secret records in the palace? His Excellency naturally had the opportunity to access the top-secret records in the palace. Perhaps the Chen Xuanba recorded there was different from the Chen Xuanba spoken of in the legends?

"Our grand Emperor Taizong modified all the histories and Daoist scriptures that he could modify, so Chen Xuanba naturally became a crude warrior that had no idea of the general situation and couldn't grasp the bigger picture. No could have thought that the true Chen Xuanba was actually a very quiet person," Zhou Tong said with a derisive air.

Priest Xin thought those two lines of commentary were rather familiar, then he remembered that it was the same evaluation the archbishop had given of Chen Changsheng not too long ago.

After a moment of silence, Zhou Tong said, "Chen Changsheng is also a very quiet person."

The 'quiet' here had many meanings. For instance, when talking was not required, one did not speak. Or when one's words were clumsy, the actions were sharp and the heart was calm. Or when encountering some great task, one would have a calm air.

The small courtyard was quiet for a very long time.

Finally, Zhou Tong said, "In addition, he is also surnamed Chen."

Priest Xin left, departing from the alley of the Northern Military Department with an extreme pressure and anxiety on his mind. This pressure on his mind had nothing to do with his two identities, but rather with that piece of information that had faintly revealed itself in Zhou Tong's words. Could Chen Changsheng really be a descendant of the Imperial clan?

He did not dare dwell on this, much less pry deeper, because it was very obvious that even Lord Zhou Tong was nervous about this matter.

Zhou Tong truly was very nervous, because he knew much more than Priest Xin, and due to his status and identity, he was required to think about and clear up these concerns.

He stood on the stone steps of the small courtyard, gazing at those crabapple trees now utterly devoid of blossoms. For what seemed like forever, he remained silent in contemplation, not caring for the disturbances coming from outside the courtyard.

Before Mei Lisha died, he said that the traitor Shang was a truly extraordinary man.

Before Mei Lisha died, he was reading the Canon of Flowing West, reading about how time was like water.

Yes, the traitor Shang could help the Empress go against the heavens and change fate. To halt an infant's growth for four years, just what did that amount to?

Perhaps Chen Changsheng was just a mature youth? But to be so dull and gloomy, to be that mature, could he really just be a sixteen-year-old youth?

Actually, the age of the disciple that the traitor Shang had brought with him away from Xining Village was a match. Moreover, it was said that he was a cripple and a mute, much more in agreement with what was said in the rumors.

But that was too conspicuous, too precise, and thus too untrustworthy.

Maybe, that disciple was used as a method to hide from the Heavenly Dao?

Perhaps the true one had long since had his life essence adjusted by the traitor Shang through the Canon of Flowing West?

Zhou Tong felt like his body was getting ever colder.

He knew that the chief eunuch most loved by the Empress had, in the past few months, been checking up on that old case in the palace.

That the Empress had not let him do this did not mean that the Empress did not trust him, but rather signified that the Empress did not want anyone else to know of this matter.

Crown Prince Zhaoming really could still be alive.

If the Empress really did go against the heavens and change fate, and it really was as described in the rumors, then the price paid for this defiance was much more miserable than the common people could imagine.

She was doomed to have no sons and grandsons, for her bloodline to be completely wiped out. Only this way could she become a person that was truly cut off from all others.

If Crown Prince Zhaoming still lived, it indicated that the Empress's change of fate was not yet truly complete!

It at least indicated that the Empress's changing of fate still had a weakness.

If all of this was true.

Then shouldn't it be that Crown Prince Zhaoming's existence should be eradicated to have everything return to tranquility?

Zhou Tong felt that the temperature of the courtyard was dropping by the second. It was obviously the beginning of summer, but it somehow felt like the courtyard was in the throes of a bitter winter.

Even he who was regarded as the most cold-blooded of all, when thinking about those stories of the past and the story that could possibly take place, couldn't help but feel that it was too cruel.

And yet, why did those people send Chen Changsheng to the capital? Did they think they could hide it forever from the Empress? Hide it from me?

Zhou Tong's complexion grew extremely unsightly. He realized that this puzzle had many things about it that were currently impossible to clarify.

The Divine Empress stood upon the Dew Platform, gazing up at the sky.

In the early morning, the sky was an azure blue. Later on, a fight took place in front of the Orthodox Academy and a carriage went off to the Department for Purging Officials. A cloud emerged from some place and the sky became gray and gloomy. It seemed like the gray sky wanted to cover up all truths, but how could it possibly have the power to obscure her eyes?

The vast majority of people believed that it was impossible to see the stars during the day, but she could. It was just that she did not like to see the stars in the day, because it would cause her to remember Emperor Xian, to remember Emperor Taizong, and to remember many other people with the surname 'Chen'. Now when she gazed up at the sky, it was precisely because she was thinking of someone with the surname 'Chen'...a youth.

She knew that Zhou Tong had guessed at something, checked on something, and begun to suspect, consequently bringing about today's excitement in the capital.

She did not care about it, much less become angry, because there were still many things that she herself was not sure of.

The stars in the day were hidden behind the radiance of the sun, but their positions were not at all different than what they were at night.

She calmly gazed at the star that was her own Fated Star, that star which was the brightest in the sky. She calmly remembered how several centuries ago, she had used an unimaginable power to change the position of this star, simultaneously changing its brightness. Automatically, the countless stars around her own also began to change.

The changing of a single person's fate would eventually affect countless others, even the fate of the entire world.

Even a butterfly flapping its wings twice could cause a storm in the Great Western Continent, to say nothing of what placing herself proudly in the clouds above could cause.

But, with all these fates gathered together, just what sort of power decided it? Was it the Heavenly Dao?

If Zhaoming really was still alive, what sort of retribution would the Heavenly Dao send against her?

If Zhaoming really did die back then, what sort of retribution

would the Heavenly Dao send then?

Several centuries ago, when she offered a sacrifice to the stars, she had once sent a wrathful and unyielding excoriation towards the Heavenly Dao. Back then, her wrath had been out of despair and grief, and she held no love or hate towards the world. Therefore, she was so powerful that not even the Heavenly Dao dared to stare directly into her eyes.

But she had not imagined that Zhaoming would actually be born.

From that moment on, she knew that she would have to directly confront the Heavenly Dao, but before she had time to do anything, the Heavenly Dao noiselessly vanished, retreating into the darkness.

Until last year, when the radiance of a star fell upon the Orthodox Academy and a person lit up their Fated Star.

The Heavenly Dao had seemingly come to find her.

The Fated Star really could turn out to be the baneful star upon her fate.

Chapter 453 - Stopping And Driving The Carriage, Speaking Of Money And Offering A Sword

With its swiftest speed, the Orthodox Academy's carriage departed from the principal alley of the Northern Military Department.

The gathered crowd outside the alley didn't have time to react. Even Mao Qiuyu and Prince Chen Liu didn't know what had occurred in that small courtyard.

With the departure of the carriage, the five hundred Orthodoxy cavalry dispersed, leaving only trails of dust.

Chen Changsheng and the rest were in such a hurry not because Zhexiu was so critically wounded that he was barely clinging to life, but rather because the shadow that had been cast over their minds by that small courtyard was far too frightening!

Lying on the stretcher, Zhexiu was dressed in a set of clean clothes. His face was the sort of pale obtained from not seeing the sun for a while and his body was rather emaciated. However, there were no visible wounds, so his situation could be considered okay.

As the carriage galloped through the street, the wind blew up a corner of the curtain. Tang Thirty-Six was able to see one of the eaves of Zhou Prison and his face slightly paled. Subconsciously, he tightened his grip on the hilt of his sword. That calm and assured

appearance he had when speaking to Zhou Tong was no longer visible at all.

Zhou Prison was sinister, but the truly frightening thing was still Zhou Tong himself.

Chen Changsheng's head was lowered, his hair already dripping with sweat. He seemed like he had just finished performing some extraordinarily strenuous physical labor.

He extracted a handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped the sweat off his face. Then he balled it up in his palm and enveloped it with his true essence.

Before he entered Zhou Prison, he had been kneading this handkerchief.

He rarely sweat, such that Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po had never seen him do so.

Today's circumstances were special. Beforehand, he had considered that it was possible he might sweat today.

Only after confirming that the handkerchief soaked in sweat was not emitting that strange scent that made him uneasy did Chen Changsheng truly relax.

The standoff with Zhou Tong in that small courtyard, to him, was much more hair-raising than his battle with Zhou Ziheng.

Because in this standoff, their minds had to bear an extremely terrifying pressure.

"Don't wipe your mouth," Tang Thirty-Six said to him as he incessantly wiped off sweat.

Chen Changsheng momentarily paused as he asked, "Why?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "To use a handkerchief to wipe the mouth will make you seem just like Zhou Tong. It will look very freakish."

From the front of the carriage came Xuanyuan Po's laughter. An honest bear youth, his standard for humor had always been this low.

This joke wasn't very amusing, but the mood in the carriage lightened up somewhat.

Chen Changsheng's mind gradually calmed, and he began to check up on Zhexiu's injuries.

He placed his finger on Zhexiu's veins and quietly listened. Suddenly, there was a muffled bang in the compartment as his finger jolted away from the vein.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What's going on?"

"Tide Rush of Blood, his old illness."

Chen Changsheng felt that there was a problem with Zhexiu's pulse. He creased his brow, but said nothing more. He removed the metal needles from his fingers, undid Zhexiu's collar, and prepared to use the needles to take a look.

The moment he undid the collar, his fingers stiffened.

After Tang Thirty-Six saw it, his body also stiffened.

Chen Changsheng's fingers began to tremble, but he still persisted in slowly undoing the clothes, revealing Zhexiu's body.

Yes, Zhexiu's face did not have the smallest wound, nor could any sign of injury or torture be seen. Because all of it was on his body.

There wasn't one inch of Zhexiu's body that was complete.

It was all wounds and rotted flesh.

There were even places where the white bone was visible.

There were even places where the bone had turned black.

Chen Changsheng had no idea how many tortures Zhexiu had

suffered, how many things he had been poisoned with.

He also did not want to know, because he could not bear to know.

The carriage compartment was deathly still.

"Stop the carriage!"

Chen Changsheng suddenly shouted.

Tang Thirty-Six's head was lowered. At some point, his right hand had once again tightly gripped the hilt of the Wenshui Sword.

Xuanyuan Po did not know what had happened within the carriage. After stopping the carriage, he entered and saw Zhexiu's miserable situation.

His eyes instantly turned red and his breathing became coarse and hurried in his fury. His arms began to thicken and steel-like hairs began to grow out of his skin, both signs of metamorphosis.

"I'm going to kill Zhou Tong!"

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six said nothing, but they were both thinking this, which was why he had yelled to stop the carriage, which was why he had gripped the hilt of his sword.

Zhexiu had been tormented into such a wretched state such that even Chen Changsheng found it impossible to maintain his calm stoicism. Tang Thirty-Six was even less able to care about his identity as the descendant of a noble clan.

If it were said that Liang Xiaoxiao had used his own death to accuse Zhexiu of colluding with the demons, then it could be said that Zhexiu suffered from his involvement with Qi Jian. Then when Zhou Tong refused to release Zhexiu and used such cruel methods to torment him, it could be said that he suffered these torments in the Orthodox Academy's place.

They were the Orthodox Academy, so it was only a matter of course that they take vengeance on Zhexiu's behalf.

At this moment, Zhexiu opened his eyes.

There was still a lemon-yellow color in the depths of his pupils.

That was the intermixture of Nanke's poison and the fierce blood of the wolf tribe.

However, because he had been poisoned by so many toxins in Zhou Prison, all these poisons mutually conflicted with each other. In these last few days, his vision was surprisingly gradually recovering.

Every time he woke up in Zhou Prison, he would have to welcome a boundless and endless pain, so when he opened his eyes,

they were cold and filled with hatred.

But after a moment, he realized that he wasn't seeing those strange torture devices that seemed to be built for use on demi-humans, but rather three young faces filled with deep concern!

It only took a few seconds for Zhexiu to completely sober up, and he was even able to guess from their expressions what these three intended to do.

The vigilance and hatred in his eyes gradually vanished but his face was still emotionless. He directly said to Xuanyuan Po, "Drive the carriage."

His voice was incredibly feeble, but it seemed to possess the feeling that it could not be refused.

Xuanyuan Po yelled, "We're prepared to attack Zhou Prison to get revenge for you."

Zhexiu looked at him and expressionlessly said, "There are many [hot pillars](#) in there. Do you want to make some simmer-fried bear-paw for them?"

(A hot pillar is an ancient Chinese punishment where the victim was tied to a burning hot metal pillar and cooked to death.)

This was also a joke that wasn't very amusing, and there was no one laughing this time.

Of course, it wasn't because everyone was stunned because Zhexiu had never been one to make jokes.

"But it's really impossible to swallow back down this emotion," Tang Thirty-Six said.

Zhexiu replied, "When you can't defeat your enemy, you have to endure. You have to keep your eyes fixed on him, grow stronger, and then kill him in one bite."

This was the way of existence for wolves.

Chen Changsheng said to him sorrowfully, "I'm sorry, it's all because I got you involved."

Zhexiu closed his eyes, ignoring him.

Xuanyuan Po returned to the front of the carriage and continued to drive it down the street.

Zhou Prison grew farther and farther away.

But the four youths on the carriage were keenly aware that there would be a day when they would return.

A cold and flat voice suddenly rang out in the carriage.

It was Zhexiu's voice, but his eyes were still shut.

"If you think I'm too wretched...just add money and it'll be fine."

Upon their return to the Orthodox Academy, the priests of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green that had long been awaiting their arrival began to use the Sacred Light technique to treat Zhexiu's wounds. Afterwards, Chen Changsheng began to personally give medical treatment, prudently using needles and scalpel to treat the appalling wounds on Zhexiu's body. It took half a day's time to complete the treatment, by which time the sky had already turned completely black.

Zhexiu's injuries were too severe. In order to make treatment more convenient and minimize movement, he did not stay in those buildings by the forest. Instead, a thick bedding was laid out on the wood flooring of the library so he could just sleep on the ground.

Under the illumination of the lantern light, Chen Changsheng looked through the directory of the Orthodox Academy, then put it back in its drawer. He turned his eyes to the wolf youth whose eyes were tightly shut, enduring the pain without saying a single word. Chen Changsheng recalled that back in the Garden of Zhou, Zhexiu had said that he wanted a sword.

"Money...right now, I don't have too much." Chen Changsheng did not pay any attention to the angry gaze shot at him by Tang Thirty-Six at the side. He said to Zhexiu, "But I have many swords. You can pick whichever one you like."

Chapter 454 - The Story Of Bear Cubs And Swords

In the Garden of Zhou, the ten thousand swords had soared into the sky and assisted Chen Changsheng in cutting down the Golden-winged Great Peng and breaking Black Robe's plot because they wanted to leave that plain where the sun never set, because they wanted to return to their homes.

Chen Changsheng had made a promise to these swords, and he would naturally not go back on his word. Thus, upon returning to the capital, even if he was somewhat reluctant, he still took the first opportunity to report this matter to the Pope.

This news had temporarily been withheld from the general populace, but after the Li Palace notified various places in the continent, it was already no longer a secret. Today's victory in the early morning, where Chen Changsheng surpassed cultivation levels and defeated the Star Condensation cultivator Zhou Ziheng, had made many people even more suspicious. They wondered whether, besides those famous swords, he had happened upon anything else in the Sword Pool. Or else how could he advance so far in his swordplay so quickly relying only on Su Li's instruction?

Chen Changsheng was not concerned about what shocks the news of the Sword Pool would cause in the continent, nor did he care about whether the gazes others sent at him would change or not. He just felt this matter to be somewhat troublesome.

Several days ago, at night, the Li Palace had sent him an extremely long list. Many sects and monasteries had expressed

their thanks to the Li Palace and Chen Changsheng, and at the same time attached proofs of relation. They requested that the Li Palace return the swords of their predecessors and ancestors. This list was very long, and the one ranked at the very top was, as expected, the temple sword of Holy Maiden Peak. Following after it were many once-famous divine weapons. According to the list, Chen Changsheng reorganized the swords in his sheath. He realized that even though the list was long, when compared to the number of famous and ancient swords within the Sword Pool, it still made up only a tiny portion. From this, one could see that of those experts and sects that had once shaken the entire continent, their descendants in the present that could still be found were not very numerous.

If one were to view this matter through the lens of history, they would undoubtedly feel the sorrow hidden in the background, easily causing them to ruefully sigh over the impermanence of the things of the world. But to him and the Orthodox Academy, this was assuredly a good thing—of the famous swords that had followed him out of the Garden of Zhou, there were at least seven thousand for which no sects could be found. In other words, he was the owner of these swords.

With a clatter, an old sword speckled with rust appeared on the floor of the library.

It was closely followed by an incessant clattering. With merely a moment's effort, the originally empty and vast library was piled full of every kind of sword. Those swords were so numerous and their combined weight so heavy that the floor of the library sank a little. It gave the feeling that it almost couldn't bear the weight anymore.

Zhexiu opened his eyes and looked over, and then he found it impossible to shut his eyes again.

Under the dim lantern light, a small mountain of swords appeared in the library.

He only wanted one sword from the Sword Pool, but Chen Changsheng had brought the entire Sword Pool back with him.

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at the mountain of swords, then at Chen Changsheng, and then he finally looked back at the mountain of swords. His mouth was agape and it took a long time before he was able to close it.

He had heard Chen Changsheng's story of discovering the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou and joining hands with the ten thousand swords to defeat his enemy, but to hear the story and to see the swords themselves were two completely different things.

Even though he came from the Wenshui Tangs who were so wealthy they could own the world, he had never seen such a sight.

He suddenly felt that although Chen Changsheng had lost so much gold and treasure in the Garden of Zhou, this business venture was still rather profitable.

Xuanyuan Po heard the sound and also came to the library, his hand still holding the filthy cloth he used to wash dishes.

With a slap, that wash cloth which was bigger than the average apron fell to the floor, splattering a bit of water.

Chen Changsheng glanced over, then chided, "I've said many times before, you have to change the wash cloth often."

At this point, Xuanyuan Po couldn't hear a word Chen Changsheng was saying. His entire being became like that of a little bear climbing a tree. With a yell, he rushed over to the mountain of swords.

The mountain of swords was not struck by his sturdy body, because he had suddenly realized that these were Chen Changsheng's things. At the last moment, he halted his steps and turned his head to Chen Changsheng. His eyes were all watery and he seemed extremely innocent and pitiful.

"Do you want one?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Xuanyuan Po nodded his head. Because he nodded too quickly and because his head was too big, a small gust of wind swept through the dark library.

Chen Changsheng said, "Pick one yourself."

Xuanyuan Po happily shouted, thrust his hand at a hilt in the mountain of swords, then pulled it out with a tug.

The screech of metal echoed through the quiet library.

He had retrieved a pitch-black sword. It wasn't at all sharp and was extremely coarse. It looked more like a metal club.

Xuanyuan Po gave it a vacant stare. He realized that this metal sword's weight and feel was extremely suitable for his strength, so much so that it was almost like this sword was meant for his use.

It must be said that there really could be some sort of indescribably mysterious connection between man and sword, a sort of destiny. It was just like those invisible lines of fate in the starry sky that could never be glimpsed by humans.

The sword that Xuanyuan Po had randomly pulled out was a heavy sword made of black iron. It was heavy as a mountain and mighty as the sea, hence its name: the Mountain Sea Sword.

This weighty sword's former master was an expert called Xi Ke. It was said that he possessed the bloodline of the White Emperor clan. In his entire life, he had never encountered defeat, until that day he lost to Zhou Dufu in the Garden of Zhou. In the end, he died at the hands of some nameless individual.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat taken aback that Xuanyuan Po would pick up this sword.

The Mountain Sea Sword was one of the most well-preserved of the swords in the Sword Pool, second only to the temple sword.

Moreover, because of the rumor that Xi Ke possessed the bloodline of the White Emperor, after the Li Palace confirmed that Xi Ke had no successor, he had originally planned to give the Mountain Sea Sword to Luoluo. However, when he saw Xuanyuan Po unable to contain his happiness and then thought about how the scene of Luoluo's elegant and childish figure flailing around with a big metal club was truly too beautiful, he decided to say nothing.

Tang Thirty-Six had something to say.

“This is the Mountain Sea Sword. Although it's plain to see that the edge of it was shorn off by Zhou Dufu's Halving Blade, now that it's appeared once more in the world, it can definitely rank in the Tier of Legendary Weapons.”

If an old and heavily damaged sword were to reappear in the world, was that enough for it to enter the Tier of Legendary Weapons?

Tang Thirty-Six was not exaggerating. If the renowned swords of history were ranked, no matter how they were ranked, the Mountain Sea Sword would always be ranked in the top ten.

Xuanyuan Po was not very encouraged by these words. Like a child holding a toy, he tightly gripped the Mountain Sea Sword and warily stared at Tang Thirty-Six. "What are you trying to say? No matter what you say, I won't be fooled by you crafty humans!"

Tang Thirty-Six teased, "Chen Changsheng is also a human, why aren't you afraid that he'll cheat you? And why so willing to

receive his sword with such goodwill?"

Xuanyuan Po didn't know how to respond. He ruminated for quite a while before saying, "He's my grandteacher, how can he be compared with a normal human? If my grandteacher gives me something, of course I have to receive it."

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "On a normal day you won't admit, but now for the sake of an old sword, you're only too willing to become a grandson. If anyone says that you bears are honest and sincere, I'll worry for his sake."

Xuanyuan Po was no match for him, so he could only huff in silence. But he held the Mountain Sea Sword to his chest even more tightly.

"What do you want to say?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "If an infant stuffs some precious treasure into his pocket and walks the streets with it, what problems do you think will occur?"

Chen Changsheng followed his gaze. Xuanyuan Po's sturdy body was like a small mountain. The originally weighty and massive Mountain Sea Sword being hugged to his chest did not seem to tower over him at all.

But Tang Thirty-Six had spoken truly. In this perilous human world, Xuanyuan Po was an infant, a bear cub.

Chen Changsheng was currently the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the Pope's appointed successor, so he clearly understood that no one, barring a scant few people, would ever dare to take the treasures he carried on him through anything less than legal means.

Not so for Xuanyuan Po. Neither the Orthodoxy nor White Emperor City would be willing to go to war for some ordinary demi-human youth.

"If he really was just some bear cub, then I really wouldn't be too concerned about his life or death. The problem is that this kid's recent performance hasn't been too bad." Tang Thirty-Six proposed, "I think that this way is better: this Mountain Sea Sword, I will safeguard it for you. When you can defeat me, that will serve as proof that you have the ability and qualification to grasp this divine weapon, and then I will return the sword to you."

As he said this, he looked at Xuanyuan Po, his expression very natural and his tone very casual.

Xuanyuan Po was almost fooled, but he cottoned on to it when he saw the smile on Chen Changsheng's lips and gave two low and angry roars. Tang Thirty-Six's little idea had been uncovered, but he wasn't angry. With a smile, he got up and pulled a paper fan from somewhere. As he waved the fan, he said, "I've said nothing but the truth. If you want to carry around the Mountain Sea Sword every day, recklessly waving it around, there will be some day when some guy is going to knock you out with a black bat."

Xuanyuan Po's expression flickered with uncertainty. He knew that Tang Thirty-Six spoke the truth, but he wasn't willing at all to hand over the Mountain Sea Sword to Tang Thirty-Six for protection. It would be better to hand it over to Chen Changsheng.

"In any case, I won't give it to you, but I also won't let other people know."

Xuanyuan Po carried the Mountain Sea Sword out of the library. Not long after, he returned, but the Mountain Sea Sword was no longer with him.

"Where'd you hide it?" Chen Changsheng was truly very curious.

Xuanyuan Po was not going to hide it from them. "The pile of firewood in the kitchen."

Chen Changsheng thought about it, then praised, "That's really not bad. Even if someone else saw it, they would just think it was a poker for stirring the fire."

Ultimately, Tang Thirty-Six was not the child of some ordinary family. The Wenshui Sword at his side was not one bit inferior to the famous swords of the Sword Pool. After realizing that it was impossible for him to get the sole sword that interested him, the Mountain Sea Sword, into his hand, he was no longer very interested. However, upon hearing the exchange between Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po, he suddenly thought of a very interesting possibility. "Do you guys think that several thousand years in the future, there will be some person who discovers the

secret of the metal sword in the Orthodox Academy's pile of firewood, comprehends the path of the sword, and then immediately becomes a peerless expert in one stroke?"

Xuanyuan Po thought, even I haven't become a peerless expert, and in the future, I plan to return to my tribe. How could I possibly leave this sword behind in the Orthodox Academy?

Chen Changsheng thought, that really is a very interesting thought, like a story out of a book. The problem is that several thousand years later, none of us will be around, so how can we know what comes after?

The more Tang Thirty-Six thought about it, the more he found the matter amusing, and his eyes began to shine abnormally bright.

"Just this one sword isn't interesting enough, we should hide a few more in the Orthodox Academy, no, dozens, or even hundreds of swords. Hide a few in the stones by the lake, stash a few in the holes of the trees, at the bottom of the lake, in the beams of the buildings...ah, right, isn't there a big bird's nest on top of the great banyan tree? ...tsk, tsk, think about it, the students of the Orthodox Academy, several decades later, finding a famous and exceptional sword in some place, that scene..."

He got more excited the more he talked about it, but Chen Changsheng could only feel more helpless the more he listened. He thought, we can disregard the fish in the lake, but just what have the birds in the trees done to offend you?

What Tang Thirty-Six said, he did. He began walking over to the mountain of swords, preparing to pick out a few of the more heavily damaged swords and hide them all over the Orthodox Academy.

He had even thought of where to hide them. He wouldn't tell anyone, not even Chen Changsheng. Only this way would their future discovery be interesting.

At this time, Zhexiu's voice rose up.

His voice was rather weak, but there was a faint ridicule within it.

"Weren't you going to let me choose a sword? Why is it that I feel that this matter has nothing to do with me?"

Chen Changsheng and the other two realized just then that from the start of this episode to its end, Zhexiu had said nothing.

To be more precise, the three had carried on such a lively conversation that they had long forgotten the original purpose.

The atmosphere was rather awkward but Tang Thirty-Six still persisted in lifelessly sighing a few words.

"This thing called presence is really quite miraculous. Clearly

you're the fiercest one of us, but now you're in such a miserable state, really..."

Chen Changsheng saw Zhexiu's complexion and hurriedly stopped Tang Thirty-Six from going any further. With great care, he asked, "Which sword do you want?"

Zhexiu raised his arm and pointed at a certain place on that mountain of swords.

Because of his injuries, his actions were rather laborious and slow, but very resolute.

Chen Changsheng and the other two followed his finger, and their expressions subtly shifted.

"You're sure it's this sword?"

"Yes."

"But...that sword's origins...it might provoke some discussion in the future."

"Since Zhou Tong says that I'm a spy for the demons, it's only natural that I use a demon's sword."

The sword Zhexiu wanted was ancient and slightly damaged, but an everlasting demonic Qi and bloody scent still pervaded its

surface.

It was the Demon Commander's Banner Sword.

Chapter 455 - The Yue Maiden

After the division of spoils, no, the division of swords had concluded, Zhexiu no longer had any energy or interest in chatting with them, once again closing his eyes. Chen Changsheng once again took his pulse, confirming that his injuries were taking a turn for the better. He relaxed a tiny bit, then realized that there seemed to be a new problem in the meridians. The tempo of the Tide Rush of Blood seemed to be much slower than before. Was this an omen that Zhexiu's true essence was on the verge of exhaustion? Chen Changsheng did not dare to dwell on this possibility. He dimmed the lantern, returned the mountain of swords to his sheath, then indicated that Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po should follow him out of the library.

"No problems, right?" Tang Thirty-Six asked.

Chen Changsheng did not directly answer the question, instead asking, "Zhou Tong, just what sort of person is he?"

This morning after leaving the office of the Department for Purging Officials and seeing Zhexiu's wretched state in the carriage, he had already secretly made a resolution. However, he could also clearly recall the mental pressure and terrifying feeling that Zhou Tong's crimson official's gown had given them as he stood amongst the snowy mantle of crabapple blossoms in that small courtyard. He really wished to know just how long he would have to wait until he could confront this terror head-on.

"Zhou Tong lied, he has no elder sister."

At noon, the Wenshui Tangs had sent over a report on this.

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "And he and the Empress didn't meet in front of some prince's mansion, but in the Hundred Herb Garden. Back then, he should still have been at Meditation, but later on, his cultivation grew by leaps and bounds and he very quickly succeeded in entering Star Condensation. It's said that this is because when he obeyed the Empress's decree to raid and exterminate the estates of those princes, he secretly obtained many treasures."

"And the Divine Empress did not care about this?" Chen Changsheng naturally knew that it was impossible for the Divine Empress to not know of this matter, so he said 'did not care'.

Tang Thirty-Six shook his head, then said, "Zhou Tong's most powerful technique is called the Great Crimson Gown. It's a sort of mental attack, said to be able to forcefully enter a cultivator's sea of consciousness."

Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po remembered that sea of blood they saw in the small courtyard, and their bodies once again grew cold. Tang Thirty-Six continued, "With the Great Crimson Gown, Zhou Tong can very easily shatter our seas of consciousness. Of course, he wouldn't do this, but if we were to go now to take vengeance for Zhexiu, we would assuredly get a small sample of it."

This was both reminder and warning.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat confused. "Since he doesn't dare to kill us, why did he have to use his Great Crimson Gown in that small courtyard? To establish dominance?"

"Zhou Tong is a brutal and sinister man, but his ability to scheme is outstanding. It isn't logical for him to do something so meaningless."

Tang Thirty-Six was also unable to understand why. Suddenly, his straight eyebrows perked up. "Back then, I felt like he wanted to use that sea of blood to shake our Dao hearts, and then he wanted to see something."

"What did he want to see?" Xuanyuan Po commented on the side. "In any case, I'm not afraid. I don't have any secrets."

Chen Changsheng fell silent, because he had many secrets.

In truth, when he came to the capital from Xining Village, he only had the secret of his body, but as time flowed by, his secrets only increased. They now included the Heavenly Tome Monoliths in the Garden of Zhou, the obsidian coffin in the Mausoleum of Zhou, the Halving Blade Style written on the wall of the coffin, and...that the Garden of Zhou might not have been destroyed, and the path to the Garden of Zhou was within his sheath.

Returning to his residence, he took a bath to calm his body, then he began to calm his mind.

He walked up to his window and gazed up at the ocean of stars in the night sky. He crossed his legs to sit down on the floor, closed his eyes, and began to meditate. He began to do his nightly homework: guiding in starlight for Purification, and then once again attempting to use that illusion of a black monolith to find a path to the Garden of Zhou.

Yet perhaps because he had grown too used to cultivating in the library or because the psychological attack he had suffered in Zhou Prison was too powerful, he found himself in the rare situation where he was slow to steady his mind.

Soon after, an extremely light and serene fragrance floated by his nose. Only then did he realize that the reason he could not calm his mind was not one of those reasons, but that he had a visitor.

Mo Yu floated out of the dark forest of the Orthodox Academy, floating right up to his window, and then floating right on in.

Under the starlight, her beauty seemed unstained by the mundane world.

She performed every one of these actions like they were especially familiar to her, as if she had practiced them countless times before.

Only she had not imagined that tonight, Chen Changsheng would be sitting cross-legged on the floor behind the bed. As a result, when she floated through the window into the building, she landed right in front of Chen Changsheng.

The two were extremely close, their noses practically touching as eyes gazed into eyes.

The scene was somewhat awkward.

Fortunately, Mo Yu smelled of orchids while Chen Changsheng was clean like the sky fresh after a rain. It wasn't so bad that either one of them would get angry.

With a gentle gust of wind, a strand of black hair floated by and landed on Chen Changsheng's face. It was rather ticklish, causing him to crease his brow.

Mo Yu flew onto the bed, her actions truly extremely practiced, as if she had performed this action countless times before.

Chen Changsheng knew of her eccentricity, but up until now, he still couldn't understand it. Of course, he was even less able to accept it.

"You aren't planning to sleep on my bed again, are you?" he asked.

"Is it not okay? In any case, you aren't even on the bed right now."

Mo Yu seemed very bold and confident, but under the light of the

stars, it was faintly possible to see that she was slightly blushing.

Chen Changsheng said somewhat helplessly, "But I'm here right now, so why did you still come?"

Mo Yu replied, "You're normally in the library cultivating. I didn't know that you would get some strange idea in your head today and come back so early."

Chen Changsheng felt himself be to very guiltless, thinking to himself, blaming me lah?

Then he once again thought of Luoluo, and how there hadn't been many opportunities to see Luoluo recently, much less talk. For some reason, his mood became rather depressed.

Mo Yu saw his expression and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Zhexiu's injuries are too heavy and he's recuperating in the library. I was worried about disturbing him, so I came back early."

Mo Yu looked at him, and then abruptly wrinkled her brow. "I expected that you would be very angry right now."

In truth, she and Chen Changsheng had not even met a few times. They couldn't be regarded as acquaintances. In that time before Chen Changsheng had exited the Mausoleum of Books, the difference in status between the two had been too great. However, for some reason unbeknownst to her, from the moment they had

met in the Imperial Palace, she realized that Chen Changsheng was a person that easily provoked her ire. Anger was, in fact, a sort of emotion, and this signified that Chen Changsheng could very easily affect her emotions.

This was a matter that she could not comprehend.

She was even less able to comprehend just how Chen Changsheng, a sixteen-year-old-youth, was able to display such control over his emotions.

Chen Changsheng did not answer her.

Today's encounter in Zhou Prison, primarily Zhexiu's wretched state which had been discovered afterwards, naturally had caused problems with his emotions. But when he was small, he had learned a very simple principle from Senior Yu Ren. Later on in Xunyang City, he had comprehended this principle even more clearly. There were some matters that were perfectly fine being stored in one's heart. There was no need to display them, only to act on them. Impulse and passion were never synonyms and to be cool-headed did not in any way mean one was a coward. Even if everyone in the world believed him to be a coward, he would not care, let alone the fact that the person speaking right now was Mo Yu.

He and Mo Yu were not friends. He keenly understood just how frightening this famed beauty of the Great Zhou Dynasty was, especially after today.

The entire continent knew that Mo Yu and Zhou Tong were the two people the Divine Empress most relied on. Zhou Tong was terrifying, so how could she possibly be lacking?

"Shouldn't you be saying 'long time no see'?" Mo Yu asked.

By careful examination, it could be affirmed that after the conclusion of the Grand Examination, they had never met.

But Chen Changsheng did not believe that there was a need for this phrase because he never wanted to meet her in the first place. It was just that she would always appear before him.

Chen Changsheng had not responded to either of her two successive inquiries, causing Mo Yu's mood to grow rather sour. She narrowed her eyes until they were sharp...like the willow leaves outside the walls of the palace, very pleasing to the eye.

"You're very hostile to me," she said.

Chen Changsheng answered, "You should be keenly aware of the current situation in the capital."

Mo Yu began to chuckle, and with a hint of derision said, "Do you think you really have the qualifications for the Empress to regard you as an enemy?"

Chen Changsheng retorted, "Even if I were qualified, I also wouldn't want to become the Empress's enemy, but it's obvious

that the people on your side don't think this way."

This was naturally speaking about the new regulation of the All-School Martial Exhibition, the suppression of the Orthodox Academy by the Tianhai clan and the new faction of the Orthodoxy.

Mo Yu's smile vanished as she said, "What other people think and how you act have nothing to do with each other."

Chen Changsheng said, "I came to the capital thinking only about cultivating and studying. I've never even thought about participating in these great affairs, but do you think I can avoid it?"

Mo Yu's voice became slightly chilly. "Why can't you avoid it? Because you are the sole successor of the old school of the Orthodoxy?"

This was naturally ample reason, because it was impossible for one to reject their own teacher and school and the years of their past. That was tantamount to a rejection of the self. But this was absolutely not the whole reason, because in the past, Chen Changsheng cared the most about cultivating quickly and defying the heavens and changing fate, but later on, he realized that he couldn't help but think about whether Luoluo's meridians could be opened, if Xuanyuan Po's right arm could be treated, if Zhexiu's Tide Rush of Blood could be cured, when Tang Thirty-Six would finally get a name that he would be satisfied with, and most importantly...if the gate of the Orthodox Academy could be kept in good condition.

He had not forgotten the words Archbishop Mei Lisha had left him before his death.

Besides pursuing what one wanted and must obtain, wasn't the thing called growing up precisely accumulating one responsibility after another?

Mo Yu stood up and looked down at him from up high. With an indifferent expression, she declared, "The Empress can never be defeated."

She had now returned to her everyday role of a powerful figure that could silence one hundred officials through fear. Her attitude did not bring about any changes in Chen Changsheng. He was thinking about the storm-ridden Xunyang City, thinking about those words Wang Po had flatly declared after Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke appeared together: "...I want to try."

It was naturally impossible for him to defeat the Divine Empress, there wasn't even a need to try.

He just wanted to try, wanted to see, if he and the Orthodox Academy could ward off this raging wave.

Mo Yu was suddenly no longer in the mood to chat. She began to make her way out of the building. Of course, she was still used to treating the window as the front door.

As she walked past, Chen Changsheng suddenly thought of a possibility. He asked uncertainly, "Could it be that while I was in the Mausoleum of Books and the Garden of Zhou, you've always been sleeping in my bed?"

Somewhat angry and ashamed, Mo Yu yelled out, "And so what?"

Chen Changsheng was very helpless. He had no power to decide this matter, but it must be known that even though he was young, he was still a man. It was impossible to argue this matter with anyone, and he was also no match for Mo Yu.

"Then..." He hesitated for quite a while, finally saying, "Make sure to remember to bathe diligently in the future. It's best if you bathe before coming each time."

The moment he said this, he knew that it was inappropriate, because it sounded very scandalous.

Just as expected, Mo Yu's slender eyebrows rose up in anger and her beautiful face became that of a fiend. In a frigid voice, she asked, "Do you want to die?"

Chen Changsheng knew that he shouldn't have said that and repeatedly said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Mo Yu's expression became slightly more gentle. She asked, "If an apology is useful, then would you be able to not kill Zhou Tong in the future?"

Chen Changsheng very sincerely replied, "Of course not."

Mo Yu said, "So it is said, words are always inferior to gifts when expressing sincerity."

Chen Changsheng was stumped for words. He thought to himself, with your status in the Great Zhou, besides a guy like Tang Thirty-Six, who would dare say they were wealthier than you? Just what could I give you?

"I hear that you have a Yue Maiden Sword here?"

Mo Yu smiled sweetly at him. "Don't you think this is such a coincidence? When I was small, the Empress just so happened to teach me that sword style."

Chapter 456 - Two Perspectives

In the Great Zhou, if Mo Yu wanted something from someone, even if it were one's entire family property, much less a sword, there would be innumerable people that would be delighted to offer it up to her with both hands and would even think of it as the greatest honor.

Although Chen Changsheng's current status was also extraordinary, if he were able to use his slip of the tongue to take this secret relationship of theirs and parlay it into a friendship, it would assuredly be a good thing.

This was like pushing a boat with the current, exceptionally easy and also very natural. No one would reject it.

Chen Changsheng did not reject it, but he also did not immediately agree. He diligently pondered this question, then he gazed into Mo Yu's eyes and asked, "Why?"

Mo Yu was stunned. It was beyond her imagination that she, who very seldom asked things of others, would actually receive this sort of answer.

She would naturally not reply to Chen Changsheng's question. With a sneer, she turned and headed out the window, disappearing into the forest.

Chen Changsheng gazed at her faintly discernible figure in the dark forest, rather confused about why her mood had so abruptly

changed.

He had previously confirmed that the Yue Maiden Sword truly wasn't on the list, but...it was his. If you ask me for it, is it not okay for me to ask for a reason? To be more straightforward, is it not okay if I don't want to give you something of mine? The villagers of Xining Village were so simple, Senior Yu Ren was so simple; why were these people of the capital so inexplicable?

He decided to no longer waste any more time thinking about these things which were many times more complex than the Daoist Canon. He closed his eyes and resumed his attempts to meditate.

Perhaps it was because Mo Yu had left too quickly, not having any time to leave too much of her perfume behind, but he was able to very quickly stabilize his mind. He quickly perceived his Fated Star and began to absorb starlight for Purification. Simultaneously, he took an extremely fine strand of his spiritual sense from his sea of consciousness and had it enter the sheath. With some difficulty, he once more traversed the now-familiar path through the ocean of harsh sword intent. He once again arrived at the other shore and saw the illusion of the black monolith. After his arduous attempts over the past few days, his spiritual sense was already at the point where it would not instantly explode upon touching the black monolith, and it could even penetrate a little deeper. Especially tonight, this strand of spiritual sense completely entered into the illusory black monolith and it could even faintly make out a cliff!

That cliff was on the verge of crumbling away, but with effort, one could tell that the peak of this cliff should have been formed

from smooth ashen stone, only it was now scored with innumerable cracks. The trees had all been destroyed, leaving behind only a few crooked pines whose roots had extended deep into the cliff face, allowing them to stubbornly persist. Moreover, distant from that cliff, he could see countless small lakes like mirrors, which seemed even more familiar to his eyes.

Was this Sunset Valley? And weren't those small lakes the wetlands of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, the place where he had emerged from after going through the bottom of the lake on the other side of that mountain? Then this was really the present-day Garden of Zhou? She...was she still inside? His spiritual sense had already dived too deep into the illusory black monolith and was bearing too great of a crushing force. Let alone diving deeper to search the Garden of Zhou, he couldn't even hold on for another second. Just by gazing from afar, just by thinking, his spiritual sense turned into a wisp of smoke and then vanished without a trace.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes and awoke.

It was still deep in the night and the sky outside his window was awash with stars. Under the starlight, the forest of the Orthodox Academy seemed very much like a lush and verdant field of grass.

Just like those weeds of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun that were taller than a man.

Chen Changsheng very naturally began to think of those days when he journeyed together with her through those plains, of how they entrusted their lives to each other in that snowy temple, of

how the blood had mixed with water in the Mausoleum of Zhou, of that conversation at the end of the divine path. If Nanke had not used the Soul Pivot to control the newborn Golden-winged Great Peng, to compel the monster tide to surround the Mausoleum of Zhou, perhaps he and she would already have begun...

To confide their deepest feelings to each other? Was this a phrase? He wasn't too sure. It was very much a strange and alien emotion that he had never touched on before. That was a very sweet sort of emotion, and yet it also made one afraid, uneasy, but this made one yearn for it. Most importantly, the sorrow and joy elicited by this emotion was so intense that it at times seemed more important than all else.

He had been learning the Daoist Canon ever since he was a child, and upon learning at the age of ten that he did not have much longer in this world, he began to even more severely control his emotions, preventing both happiness and sadness. And yet when they journeyed through the plains with her on his back, when they sat in front of the stone door at the end of the divine path with their shoulders touching, or when he was thinking about her now, he found himself unable, and also unwilling, to control this sort of emotion. Because he was fond of the beauty of those moments and confirmed now that he still longed for them...

Then, just where are you?

Xu Yourong walked along a cliff.

Her appearance was like a painting: a tinge of childishness, a moving prettiness, a solemn holiness.

Yes, this was a rhyme, because her beauty was absolutely sublime. Besides with an ethereal rhyme, it was very difficult to use real things to describe it. The night wind brushed her sleeve and her white garments drifted on the breeze. As she slowly walked, her footsteps seemed to possess their own imposing air. Yet upon careful examination, it would perhaps be possible to see in her limpid eyes a faint sorrow.

A young lady not yet sixteen should be enjoying her youth; just why was she in such sorrow?

Because news had come once more to Holy Maiden Peak that no one knew who that Snow Mountain Sect disciple was. Even the distant Snow Mountain Sect in the northwest was unwilling to admit that it had a disciple called Xu Sheng. Perhaps you snuck into the Garden of Zhou, perhaps you were a secret sect disciple, perhaps you had some secrets, but none of that is important. Only, were you really called Xu Sheng? Did you really just die like this?

Upon departing from the Garden of Zhou, because her wounds were so serious, she had secluded herself in the back mountain of Holy Maiden Peak to recuperate. She no longer went out every day to appreciate the snow, to listen to the rain, or to pluck herbs—only rested, read, and thought.

She thought of her experiences in the Garden of Zhou, the life and death in the plains, and that man.

She had originally resolved herself to consecrate her life to the

Great Dao within the books, but she had never anticipated that she would really encounter an incident in her life that would make her heart throb for the first time. But that throbbing of the heart had also swiftly passed away with the wind. This was a dull grief nigh-impossible to describe with words, a deeply ingrained memory that she had no one to tell. She was keenly aware that perhaps this memory would forever accompany her in the future endless years of cultivation. And only she knew that this would ultimately become a corner of her spiritual world that no one else would be able to access.

That was a world which she temporarily did not want to take leave of, so she naturally cared little for the affairs outside this world. Su Li, Liang Wangsun, Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, Wang Po, Zhu Luo, Guan Xingke...that storm in Xunyang City had shaken the entire continent, but it was unable to make her raise her slightly lowered eyelids. Only her teacher the Holy Maiden and Chen Changsheng, these two names, could cause her to be attentive for a few moments.

But there were people that she had to care about and which she truly did care about.

The internal strife of Mount Li, the revolt planned by Xiao Songgong and the other two elders, Qiushan Jun being heavily injured on the verge of death—these pieces of news had long since been spread to the entire south.

When her injuries had gradually recovered and she emerged from the back mountains of Holy Maiden Peak, she heard this news and knew that she had to pay a visit.

Yes, she was walking along a cliff.

She was walking upon Mount Li.

Chapter 457 - Those Things Which You Know Nothing About

It was known throughout the world that Qiushan Jun had a deeply-rooted affection for Xu Yourong, and people also once believed that Xu Yourong held similarly deep feelings for Qiushan Jun. The True Dragon and the Heavenly Phoenix, both of the same sect, had grown up together. One was highly likely to be inheritor to the position of Saint of the Longevity Sect that had lain fallow for several decades, while the other was the future Holy Maiden of the south. From every aspect, this was a match made in heaven.

Until...last year's Ivy Festival in the capital.

In that Ivy Festival, Chen Changsheng took out a marriage contract. In that same Ivy Festival, Xu Yourong had the White Crane bring a letter. In that letter, she clearly wrote none of it was as the populace had imagined. It was only at that moment that the world knew that the so-called match made in heaven was, as was inevitable and right, only a beautiful dream and hope in their minds.

If it were a normal young girl in this situation, they would not have been willing to meet Qiushan Jun now because it was awkward and inconvenient. If it were one of those exceptionally intelligent girls who did things with resolve and were not ordinary in the least, they would also not wish to meet Qiushan Jun, because only by refusing to meet could they allow him to quickly pacify his emotions.

But Xu Yourong did not act this way. She was not some youth

that was like a cool breeze. Her Dao heart was spotless. She did not plan, nor would she deliberately change her mind.

Walking to the dwelling at the peak of Mount Li, she placed her empty lunchbox on the table. She said to Qiushan Jun on the bed, "Junior Sister Qi Jian is still very weak, but she's always thinking about going to the capital to find Zhexiu."

Qiushan Jun leaned on the bedhead, his pale face brimming with concern. "When Martial Granduncle returned to the mountain and heard of this matter, he was very unhappy. He scolded Junior Sister for a very long time!"

Xu Yourong was rather puzzled. "Senior Su Li is confident and uninhibited, why is he so unreasonable on this matter?"

Qiushan Jun smiled, explaining, "When any man plays the role of a father, they always have to become that father-in-law they found most loathsome when they were young."

Xu Yourong said, "But I still don't understand why he has to so strictly oppose it."

After a moment of silence, Qiushan Jun responded, "In the past, Martial Granduncle met that wolf cub on the snowy plains. He said...that wolf cub has an illness, that he can't live for very long!"

This was the first time Xu Yourong had heard of this matter. She thought of how that wolf cub which had placed the greatest

pressure on her in the Proclamation of Azure Sky not only had such a miserable history, but also such an unbearable fate. She couldn't help but sigh.

Qiushan Jun gazed at her and said, "No father would agree to marry their daughter to someone who will die prematurely...now that I think of it, Martial Granduncle also cursed Chen Changsheng for three days because of this matter."

Xu Yourong chuckled, but said nothing. Only after coming to Mount Li did she come to know of those matters that had occurred after the Garden of Zhou, such as the story of how Chen Changsheng had accompanied Su Li through the snowy plains to Tianliang. She was forced to admit that these feats of his had caused her to change her impression of the fellow called Chen Changsheng. Ultimately, though, that fellow was called Chen Changsheng. She would not speak ill of him to his face, but she also did not wish to praise him.

Qiushan Jun said no more. Borrowing the light of the Night Pearl on the wall, he continued studying the sword classic in his hands.

Xu Yourong took up a scroll of the 'Classic of Longevity' from the table and began to silently read it.

The dwelling was very peaceful, but there wasn't anything scandalous about it. It was extremely natural, just like how Xu Yourong had walked in and the two began to have a conversation. The conversation had concluded, but there was no need to intentionally do anything else.

Several years ago, when Xu Yourong was still a little girl, she came to Holy Maiden Peak from the capital. She began to cultivate and study in South Stream Temple, comprehending the Heavenly Tomes. The two would often meet, and they would often enact this scene: the two sitting down opposite each other, quietly reading without words.

The common folk had believed that the two innocent playmates had grown up as childhood friends, but both of them knew that this characterization was not at all accurate. They were innocent because both of them clearly understood what the other was thinking.

After some time had passed, Xu Yourong got up and said, "Senior Brother, I'll be leaving now. I'll come to see you again tomorrow."

Qiushan Jun shifted his gaze from the book to her, but he did not do as he had done for the past several nights, for the past several years, and tell her that she should take care on the way back.

In the past few years, these had been the calmest and most cheerful few nights he had experienced.

Because he could quietly look at her, whether at her fluttering eyelashes, her finger flipping the pages, or the slight curving of her lips.

He didn't have to watch her at every moment, just when he was tired of reading his book and casually raising his head. When he

saw her sitting there, he would feel calm and at ease, and then cheerful.

He wished there could be even more of these nights, so he wished to say a few things more.

"Because of Martial Granduncle's matter, my Mount Li Sword Sect owes him an enormous favor. No matter what enmity existed between us in the past, now it is only us that owe him." Qiushan Jun gazed at her and said, "But this matter and this favor have never had anything to do with each other. I want to say that he's very outstanding, suitable for you. He is in no way as naughty and mischievous as you described him when you were small, and he is even less as unbearable as you mentioned in your letters. So then, just what is your view on this engagement now?"

The person mentioned in these words was naturally Chen Changsheng.

Qiushan Jun's tone was very calm, very magnanimous, and very sincere.

Xu Yourong pondered this, then said, "After a while, I will go to the capital to end the engagement."

"Directly ending the engagement..." Qiushan Jun seriously said, "To Chen Changsheng, this is inevitably rather unfair. Gossip is a fearful thing. The things your family did in the past year amount to a humiliation."

Xu Yourong looked him in the eyes and calmly replied, "But if this engagement is fulfilled, that is unfair to me."

This engagement with Chen Changsheng had been decided by her grandfather. No one had ever asked her opinion on it.

Qiushan Jun fell into silence, then said, "My apologies."

This apology was for the mission the south had sent to the capital last year to propose. At the time, there had also been no one to ask Xu Yourong of her opinion.

Xu Yourong chuckled, but said nothing. She had a profound understanding of Qiushan Jun's conduct and believed that the matter had nothing to do with him. Back then, she had been sent off by her teachers and elders to the Southern Sea to quietly cultivate while Qiushan Jun had been striving against those young demon experts for the key to the Garden of Zhou...

As she thought of the Garden of Zhou, her eyes like limpid autumn water were suddenly suffused with the slightest tinge of dull sadness.

In the Mausoleum of Zhou, he had said that he had an engagement, but he said that he would end it.

She had also said to him that she had an engagement, but she would absolutely not marry that man.

Why had there been this sort of conversation? Naturally, it was because he wanted to marry her, and she wanted to marry him. Although they had not said it, although he was already dead, how could she refuse it? How could she forget?

Yes, so she had to return to the capital to end the engagement, whether Chen Changsheng was good or bad. None of it was important, because he could not be him.

"Junior Sister, what's wrong?"

Qiushan Jun could sense the slightest changes in her emotional state, because in these past few years, his thoughts had always been on her. He could sense her sadness and couldn't help but be concerned.

"It's nothing..." Xu Yourong looked into Qiushan Jun's eyes and suddenly felt that it was not right to conceal this matter from him. After a momentary pause, she said, "Senior Brother, there is a matter that you are not aware of. The reason I persist in ending the engagement is that there is someone that I love."

The dwelling abruptly became abnormally quiet, quieter than it had been when the two were reading books.

Qiushan Jun suddenly laughed, saying, "Presumably, that person is assuredly not me."

Xu Yourong smiled, then gave a rough description of all that she

had encountered in the Garden of Zhou. She primarily spoke of that Snow Mountain Secret Sect disciple called Xu Sheng.

Qiushan Jun's smile faded away. After what seemed like an endless silence, he said, "Junior Sister, he is probably already dead."

Xu Yourong calmly answered, "I know."

Qiushan Jun gazed at her with concern.

Walking out of the dwelling, she stood at the edge of the cliff. Under the starlight's illumination, the pine trees whistled as the wind blew through them, and they seemed just like a silver ocean.

She turned her gaze to the young man dressed as a scholar at the edge of the cliff and said, "Second Brother."

Gou Hanshi had left the Mausoleum of Books in advance because he had learned what had occurred at Mount Li. He had arrived even earlier than she had.

He turned to Xu Yourong, wanting to say something to her. Ultimately, he could only sigh.

To him, Xu Yourong was Junior Sister and Qiushan Jun was Eldest Brother. He was the person that most understood the relationship between the two, and he also understood many things going on in the capital.

Below the pines that were akin to a silver ocean was an exceptionally precipitous cliff. A mournful howl suddenly emerged from that cliff.

Xiao Songgong and the two elders of the Discipline Hall were currently imprisoned in the cliffs of Mount Li. The two Discipline Hall elders had not yet recovered from their heavy injuries, but Xiao Songgong's end had been even more miserable. His two arms had been directly chopped off on Su Li's order.

As for that elder that had attempted to avail himself of Su Li's absence to reassert the authority of the Longevity Sect, his cultivation had been crippled by Su Li himself. As expected, the conduct of the Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li was cold-blooded and ruthless.

Su Li was currently in the back mountains tending to his injuries. Xu Yourong also had to go there, because her teacher, the Holy Maiden of the south, was also there. It was only after the storm in Xunyang City that all of Mount Li, all of the south, and all of the continent realized that the Holy Maiden and Su Li actually had such a deep relationship. It was also the first time Xu Yourong heard of this matter.

"There's no need to speak of anything else. Only, if you insist on returning to the capital to end the engagement, I hope that you do as much as you can to give Chen Changsheng face," Gou Hanshi looked at her and said.

Xu Yourong was rather surprised. After so many matters, especially Chen Changsheng and Su Li's majestic journey south, she had already begun to doubt the things Shuang'er and Mo Yu had written in their letters. She no longer viewed Chen Changsheng with as much disdain, but it was beyond her expectations that Gou Hanshi would voluntarily speak for him.

"Chen Changsheng...just what sort of person is he?"

Hearing her question, Gou Hanshi contemplated it for quite a long while. Finally, he produced a verdict: "He is a real person."

He and Xu Yourong did not know that on the journey south, Su Li had also evaluated Chen Changsheng as such.

"Is he?"

Xu Yourong trusted in Gou Hanshi's judgment of others, but she couldn't help but be a little absent-minded. She had originally forgotten many things from when she was a child, but after Chen Changsheng entered the capital, she gradually began to recall. However...

She pushed it from her mind. Perhaps there really was some misunderstanding, but it had nothing to with her.

She bid farewell to Gou Hanshi and took the pine tree-lined mountain path to the back mountain.

Gou Hanshi suddenly thought of a matter and said, "Junior Sister, Chen Changsheng, he..."

Xu Yourong turned back to him.

Gou Hanshi had originally wanted to tell her that Chen Changsheng had discovered the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou, that the Li Palace was prepared to return these swords to the various sects, and that amongst these swords was the temple sword that had been lost by Holy Maiden Peak. However, upon seeing her slightly lonesome expression, he knew that she did not want to hear it. And when he thought about how she might have already known of this matter, he shook his head and said, "It's nothing."

Chapter 458 - Help Me Return This Umbrella To Him

Chen Changsheng had found the Sword Pool and carried out many swords. This matter had not been spread widely for the moment, but it could no longer be considered a secret.

It was just that Xu Yourong had since been in seclusion to recover from her injuries and so she really knew nothing at all of this matter. However, everyone believed that she naturally knew of it. If Gou Hanshi had brought it up, then she should have been able to guess at a few matters beforehand, but in fact...what time she learned of it was never important.

This statement was very awkward, but the reasoning behind it was incredibly simple.

As in both stories and real life, people would always encounter this or that problem. Some problems make one want to drink poison and throw oneself into the grave, while other problems make one unsure whether to laugh or cry as one enters into a beautiful marriage predestined by fate. In the final analysis, the conclusions of these lives and stories had not much to do with those problems that occurred on the way. The most important factor was just how one resolved these problems.

As Xu Yourong made her way to the back mountain of Mount Li, her teacher was at this very moment attempting to resolve a problem. As an equal of the Pope and the leader of the southern sects, the problem that she sought to resolve was naturally one of titanic proportions.

This problem was called 'the confluence of north and south'.

If the humans wanted to obtain complete victory over the demons, or at the least completely remove their threat, they needed to truly unify, or to use the saying that had been going around for the past two centuries, 'the confluence of north and south'.

The Great Zhou Dynasty occupied its every waking moment with thinking of ways to truly conquer the south, but even the wise Emperor Taizong, the Divine Conqueror, was only able to make the families and sects of the south nominally recognize the legitimacy of the capital. When the Divine Empress took the reins of power, it had also been her deepest wish to conquer the south, but she was also unsuccessful. Ten-odd years ago, the Liang Household and the Longevity Sect conspired together to take the south and invade the north. Although this seemed more like a joke in retrospect, it also indicated that the confluence of north and south was an irresistible trend.

Many centuries ago, the reasons for the failure of the confluence of north and south were complex. However, in these recent two centuries, the entire continent, including the demons, knew that the reason why the combined will and forceful promotion of the Tianhai Divine Empress, the Pope, and the Holy Maiden of the south—these three Saints—had failed to advance the confluence of the north and south a single step was all essentially due to a single person's existence.

Because Su Li did not consent.

Why was it that after Su Li had fought a bloody battle against the demon experts on the snowy plains, he had to immediately confront the shameless pursuit of the human world? Why was it that the Saints and the Eight Storms had disregarded any harm to their reputation in their insistence that Xunyang City be his place of death? Because he had killed too many people? Of course not. It was because once Su Li was dead, the confluence of north and south, this grand undertaking, could finally have a chance of success.

"I don't want you to become the second Zhou Dufu," the Holy Maiden softly said to Su Li. "If you feel that the faces of the Zhou people are truly too shameless, just think of it as that which you do not see is clean!"

Su Li shook his head, saying, "You've never understood why I don't agree to this matter."

"And just when will you truly open yourself up to me?" The Holy Maiden smiled as she looked into his eyes.

Xu Yourong knew that her teacher and Su Li were aware of her arrival. However, the actions of her seniors could be like the cool breeze and the vast sky of stars and she really couldn't continue listening. She stepped forward and offered her greetings.

Su Li pointed at her and said to the Holy Maiden, "If you have the time, first resolve the problems of your disciple."

Xu Yourong's expression seemed to chill. Just what problem do I have?

Su Li continued, "Her problem is even more troublesome than the confluence of north and south, such that not even I know what to do."

The Holy Maiden arched her brows, asking, "What problem?"

Su Li said, "Of course it's the greatest problem of life. Qiushan Jun or that idiot Chen Changsheng, not even I can say who is better. Just who is she going to marry?"

A little displeased, the Holy Maiden chided, "Just what are you blabbering about in front of a junior?"

Xu Yourong truly found it difficult to accept...this sort of scene. She sighed in her heart, and she also felt that Senior Su Li's words were actually faintly more favorable when speaking of Chen Changsheng.

"I will not marry anyone," she declared. "I will go to the capital to end the engagement."

Su Li's brows shot up as if they were swords about to soar up into the night sky above Mount Li. But in the end, he chose to say nothing.

The Holy Maiden looked at her in pity. What Xu Yourong had

encountered in the Garden of Zhou, she had spoken of to no one, including her. But a person of her caliber needed only a glance several days ago to see that her own disciples had encountered some romantic block, so she no longer discussed the engagement. Changing the subject, she said, "When you go to the capital, represent your teacher and go to the Li Palace to pick something up."

Xu Yourong replied, "Yes, master, but I don't know what the item is."

The Holy Maiden explained, "The Sword Pool of the Garden of Zhou has reappeared. Chen Changsheng is willing to return those swords to their old sects, and the temple sword is among them. For the moment, it is temporarily in the custody of the Li Palace."

The temple sword was the sword meant to be carried by the Holy Maiden. Many years ago, Zhou Dufu had snatched it away from Holy Maiden Peak after which it was never found again.

Hearing this news, Xu Yourong was incredibly shocked, and then she felt that something wasn't quite right.

Yes, something was very wrong...

Su Li suddenly asked, "When do you plan to go to the capital?"

Xu Yourong awoke from her daze and responded, "After the winter solstice."

Su Li said, "Since you're going to the capital, help me return something to Chen Changsheng. You even know each other."

Xu Yourong was subconsciously a little resistant to this idea. She declared, "I don't know him."

"Girl, you're as stubborn as your master."

Su Li said, "Tianhai and your master taught you, and Old Man Yin only has him as a junior. You two will have to fight eventually. You don't have to meet him when ending the engagement, but is it possible to fight him without meeting?"

Xu Yourong knew that this was true. Upon returning to the capital, disregarding the events of the Ivy Festival and the Grand Examination and basing it purely on the current state of affairs in the capital, she and Chen Changsheng would inevitably have to fight.

"What thing?"

"An umbrella."

Su Li seemingly took a yellow paper umbrella from out of nowhere and handed it to Xu Yourong.

In the past, this had been the umbrella that he treasured the most

and within was the sword which he had wished to find the most. This umbrella was also a symbol of an era.

So on the snowy plains, even if he and Chen Changsheng bickered like children, he was still unwilling to give it away.

But now, he just casually threw this umbrella away.

The Holy Maiden's expression subtly shifted and her voice seemed to be a bit shaky. "You've really...agreed?"

Su Li said, "I'm still considering it, but...if I really have the chance to go to a different world and see, it's far better than sticking around this swamp smelling all these awful stench." "

The Holy Maiden said no more, only quietly gazing at him with gratitude and fond remembrance.

If Xu Yourong were looking at this scene, she would definitely have felt very helpless, but she was not.

Her eyes were currently transfixed on the umbrella in her hands, that old umbrella.

Naturally, she recognized this umbrella.

She had held this umbrella.

She had lifted this umbrella.

From the plains to the Mausoleum of Zhou.

Carrying it for a thousand li, passing several times through the four seasons.

Back then, she was on his back, the umbrella in her hands.

This umbrella had served her and him as shelter against the rain and snow, to block out the wind and frost, to avoid the dust, to point the way.

Return...Chen Changsheng...Sword Pool...temple sword...him.

Her face instantly turned white as snow.

She was somewhat despondent.

She was incredibly dazed.

Just what was going on here?

Chapter 459 - What's The Situation?

Qiushan Jun's face was pale, but it was different from the paleness of the past few days, which had been caused by his loss of blood and severe injuries. It was even more haggard, and even more downcast.

It had only been half a night, but he seemed to have experienced something that had effected a great transformation upon him.

Gou Hanshi saw and understood the reason for this. His mood was very complex: sympathetic, and also rather displeased.

He was sympathetic for his Eldest Brother and displeased at Xu Yourong.

He knew that this matter was not because Xu Yourong had erred. It was that there was naturally a difference in relationship between those close to oneself and those distant. Moreover, he failed to understand just how the matter had developed to this point.

Even though he had studied the Daoist Canon since he was a child, he still could not understand this matter.

After some time had passed, Qiushan Jun abruptly said, "In a few days, Junior Sister will return to the capital. If it's okay with you, go along with her."

Gou Hanshi was somewhat puzzled, asking, "What's wrong?"

Qiushan Jun gazed outside the dwelling at the starlight, saying, "Martial Granduncle...will probably depart together with the Holy Maiden. The path the south travels in the future will depend on what happens in the capital."

Gou Hanshi was stunned at these words. Only after a long time was he able to calm back down and inquire, "Why is Junior Sister returning to the capital? She can't really be going to personally end the engagement."

Qiushan Jun shook his head and said, "That matter is not important. On the contrary, I'm most concerned about her fight with Chen Changsheng."

Gou Hanshi was even more perplexed. Why is it that Martial Granduncle, Master, and even you, Eldest Brother, so firmly believe that once Junior Sister returns to the capital, she will have to fight with Chen Changsheng!?

"Before the confluence of north and south, neither the Divine Empress nor the Pope will be willing to stir up any waves. In other words, these two Saints will assuredly maintain their silence. The battle for the emperor's throne will remain beneath the waves for now, but the Orthodoxy's new rule, the All-School Martial Exhibition...the matter involving the Tianhai clan and those two archbishops, in truth, is very similar to the matter involving the Pope and Archbishop Mei Lisha: it is all for building up momentum for this final battle."

Qiushan Jun gazed at him calmly and continued, "From the Ivy Festival to the Grand Examination and then to the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng walked amongst the starlight. First he overcame you, then he overcame his fate. If he continues to overcome, then when his reputation and fame are at their height and then Junior Sister Yourong returns to the capital from the south and overcomes him in one stroke, then who in the future would so lightly challenge the majesty of the Divine Empress?"

Then he slightly creased his brow and said, "It's just a bit too cruel."

Gou Hanshi understood what he meant by 'cruel'. Shaking his head, he asked, "Just what did Junior Sister say to you previously?"

Qiushan Jun very calmly related just what Xu Yourong had said to him, like how she loved that possibly dead secret sect disciple of the Snow Mountain Sect.

Gou Hanshi thought to himself, isn't this just another form of cruelty? After a seemingly endless silence, he asked, "Is it just going to be like this?"

Only after another long silence did Qiushan Jun respond, "It is impossible to defeat a dead man."

Gou Hanshi didn't know what to say, only mumbling to himself, "It's just not right."

"Who is not right? Junior Sister?" Qiushan Jun smiled at him. "Tell me, why do you think it was impossible to block Zhou Dufu's blade?"

Gou Hanshi answered, "Because it was fast."

Qiushan Jun grinned. "Because sometimes one blade making two halves...is true mercy."

The Intellectual Sword could chop at the threads of emotion, as could the blade.

He smiled, and then began to cough.

His coughs were very painful—painful with grief. Several drops of blood speckled his clothes.

Emotion sprang from parts unknown and extended deep within. How could a blade or sword so easily cut it away?

Chen Changsheng had no idea at all of the storm gathering force over the capital, that the final conclusion of the new rule would fall upon his and Xu Yourong's shoulders. Similarly, the wariness and hostility held against the Orthodoxy's old faction and the Imperial clan by the Tianhai clan, the Orthodoxy's new faction, and the sects and noble families of the distant south also completely fell upon him and the Orthodox Academy.

At five o'clock in the morning, he promptly woke up, just as he

done for the past several years. After steadying his mind for a few moments, he opened his eyes, got up, put on his clothes, washed his face, and rinsed his mouth.

Rain was falling outside his window, but the summer's morning wind was not any colder as a consequence, nor did the noise coming from the distant school gate decrease any. He was already used to hearing all the various noises and pieces of news coming from there and was no longer as rushed as he was in the past. He very calmly handled the matters at hand, then went to the kitchen on the other side of the lake. He ate two bowls of millet porridge, two steamed buns made of sorghum flour, and two extremely thin slices of Red River Ham. While doing so, he also decided to find that Mountain Sea Sword stashed in the pile of firewood. Only after doing so did he finally head over to the library.

Yesterday when returning from Zhou Prison, he saw that the awning on the street had not been taken down. He and Tang Thirty-Six guessed that the so-called All-School Martial Exhibition would not conclude simply because Zhou Ziheng had been heavily injured. Surpassing cultivation levels to defeat a Star Condensation cultivator was an event truly quite capable of causing a stir in the entire continent, but what did it amount to when compared to the arrogance and power of the Tianhai clan?

Especially because the Li Palace persisted in maintaining its silence.

That the Li Palace maintained its silence did not mean that the old faction of the Orthodoxy and the Pope no longer cared for the Orthodox Academy. Since a few days ago, the Orthodox Academy

had been under the constant guard of many Li Palace priests and Orthodoxy cavalry. Although they could not block out the sound, they had kept the academy itself safe.

A Li Palace priest surnamed Lu hurriedly walked into the academy. He rushed to prevent Chen Changsheng from walking into the library, gave a reverential bow, then offered up a letter with both hands.

A letter being sent to the Orthodox Academy at this time was naturally a letter of challenge.

Chen Changsheng greeted Priest Lu in return, thanking him for his labors in these past few days. However, he did not take the letter of challenge, instead indicating that the priest should take it to the building over and find Tang Thirty-Six. Since he was going over there, he also might as well pass on to Tang Thirty-Six that he should get up earlier to eat breakfast. It was fine if the millet porridge turned cold, but if he were to be any later, then the entire bowl of sliced Red River Ham might be entirely eaten up by Xuanyuan Po.

Upon walking into the library, he first examined Zhexiu's status, and then took from his bosom a medicine that Luoluo had requested Guardian Jin bring over last night. He took out one of his needles and dipped it in a green juice made from ground herbs that Tang Thirty-Six had blindly stolen from the Hundred Herb Garden last night. He then inserted the needle into the space between Zhexiu's eyebrows and began to slowly twirl it in his fingers, continuing to treat Zhexiu's injuries.

After quite some time had passed, the combined medicinal might of the precious medicine from the Li Palace and the herbal juice of the Hundred Herb Garden, urged on by the metal needle, completely entered Zhexiu's meridians and began to disperse throughout his body.

Upon accomplishing this, Chen Changsheng felt rather exhausted, his body rather hot. However, he did not sweat as he did yesterday.

To detoxify the poisons in Zhexiu's body was not a difficult task. Nanke's Peacock Plume, which had caused him the most concern, had already become extremely weak—perhaps because of the Sacred Light technique used by the cardinals of the Li Palace, or perhaps because of the poisons of Zhou Prison conflicting with each other. It was completely inconsistent with the amount of poison that Zhexiu had described.

Currently, he was most concerned about the problem of Zhexiu's meridians.

With a creak, the door to the library was pushed open. Xuanyuan Po walked in and asked, "What am I learning today?"

There were currently no teachers in the Orthodox Academy. If Xuanyuan Po wanted to learn something, he would naturally have to ask him. Chen Changsheng had experience in this aspect. He had taught students in the Orthodox Academy and he also knew many demi-human techniques. He knew the special makeup and meridians of the demi-human body like the back of his hand. Moreover, after the Grand Examination, he had also treated

Zhexiu's illness many times. He was now even more confident that he could teach demi-humans the cultivation methods of humans.

He took up a book that he had already prepared and handed it over. "From today onwards, you will learn the Heavenly Thunder Bringer."

The Heavenly Thunder Bringer was not a commonly seen cultivation technique. To be more precise, it was one of the scriptures of the Orthodoxy. It was said that if this scripture were cultivated to the pinnacle, one would obtain extraordinary strength. When the fist moved, it would call the winds. When the fist fell, it would summon the rain. Like a demon god, one could even bring down heavenly thunder to slay incomparably powerful enemies.

But things that were said were often merely legends. No one could make out how to cultivate in this scripture, so it was only natural that no one had succeeded in cultivating it.

Xuanyuan Po was an honest bear youth, but that did not mean he was an idiot. Especially after he had spent so many days in the Orthodox Academy, forced by Chen Changsheng to read so many books, his mind had long been opened and his knowledge had gradually broadened. As he gazed at the scripture in his hand, he asked in a hurt tone, "You're teasing me, aren't you? Or is it that you think that all I can be in the future is a priest that summons the rain?"

The secrets of Heavenly Thunder most commonly appeared when praying for rain. The priest would lead the populace in

reciting it aloud. But had anyone, after reading this scripture, seen the altar shine, closely followed by gusting winds and gathering clouds, thunder and lightning, and then torrential rain? Even if this scripture was real, just how could Xuanyuan Po, who was willing to bet his life so that he could become a demi-human Divine General, want to become a Daoist who could call the winds and summon the rain?

Chen Changsheng gave no explanation. He used his status as principal, his majesty as grandteacher, and most importantly, Luoluo's trust and the ownership of the Mountain Sea Sword to successfully suppress the first possible occurrence of skipping class after the reopening of the Orthodox Academy.

Roughly breathing, Xuanyuan Po angrily and unwillingly marched himself over to the window and, under the light of day, began to cultivate.

It gradually grew quiet outside the Orthodox Academy's gate, but this in no way meant that the situation had been settled.

The All-School Martial Exhibition was a simple name, but as the matter involved the Orthodoxy's nurturing of cultivators and, even more importantly, the war between the humans and demons, it naturally possessed its own set of rules and levels.

Chen Changsheng ignored these matters. After confirming that Zhexiu had gone back to sleep and that Xuanyuan Po really was seriously studying the scripture, he also began to meditate in cultivation. Last night, he had managed to enter the illusory black monolith and unexpectedly caught a glimpse of the vistas of the

Garden of Zhou. This had given him hope and had made him even more anxious.

As for those things going on outside the gate...Tang Thirty-Six was naturally there to take care of it. Neither Chen Changsheng nor Xuanyuan Po had the ability, and even if Zhexiu were not injured, he only knew how to fight and kill. For this reason, Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po had always been waiting for Tang Thirty-Six to emerge from the Mausoleum of Books. And Tang Thirty-Six had not disappointed their expectations. On the first day of his return, he had sent Tianhai Ya'er flying with a kick and cursed Zhou Ziheng.

Just how would he do it today?

Tang Thirty-Six's mouth was currently occupied with the lesser part of a steamed bun. Within the steamed bun was half a slice of Red River Ham, the last piece that he had been able to find in the kitchen. He took the letter of challenge offered by that priest surnamed Lu from the Li Palace and, without even looking at it, walked out the gate.

Two squadrons of Orthodoxy cavalry grimly stood in the drizzling rain. Beyond them was a dense crowd of people. When this crowd saw the gate of the Orthodox Academy being pushed upon, it exploded in an uproar. Tang Thirty-Six was startled and the steamed bun in his mouth almost fell into a puddle. In a rather garbled voice, he asked, "What's the situation?"

Chapter 460 - He Stands Amidst The Flowers

The Li Palace priest surnamed Lu said rather helplessly, "They're all just here to watch, and it's not like we can drive them too far away."

The awning on the street did not contain any important figures besides the stewards of the Four Great Markets, but the common folk of the capital that had arrived to see the spectacle were already numerous.

It was clearly only six in the morning, and it was even raining! Tang Thirty-Six felt extremely helpless, and also very furious. He thought to himself, isn't it just fighting? Just what's so good about watching that? Is it worth it to get out of bed so early?

The crowd gradually parted and then slowly became quiet. A middle-aged man wearing a black teaching gown expressionlessly strode onto the scene.

Tang Thirty-Six tore open the letter and gave it a few glances. He confirmed that today's challenger was actually a lecturer from the Li Palace Academy.

His sword-like eyebrows slightly creased. It wasn't because his opponent was an expert at the peak of Ethereal Opening, but rather because the perplexity in his mind was growing ever deeper and he felt that this situation was getting ever stranger.

Besides Star Seizer Academy, the other five Ivy Academies were all under the direct jurisdiction of the Orthodoxy. Could it be that within the Orthodoxy, there were really so many people...who dared to go against the will of the Pope?

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The door to the library was pushed open, the breeze bringing a few drops of rain inside with it, as well as Tang Thirty-Six.

"I can't understand this matter," he declared to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng shook his head and said, "In the present Orthodoxy, there are many people, including many priests of the Li Palace, who experienced the chaos of the Orthodox Academy back then. They killed many of the experts who had devoted themselves to the Imperial clan, but many of their hands are also stained with the blood of the students and teachers of the Orthodox Academy. It's simply impossible for them to accept the Imperial clan's return to power and the reappearance of the Orthodox Academy. It actually has nothing to do with going against the will of His Holiness."

After a brief pause, he continued, "His Eminence said it very well. His Holiness has turned too quickly. Even those loyal to him find themselves unable to turn with him for the moment."

Tang Thirty-Six fell into thought, then mused, "That's reasonable, but I still feel that something's not right."

Chen Changsheng was more concerned about more practical things. He inquired, "What level is that lecturer from the Li Palace Academy?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "He's not Star Condensation, but the peak of Ethereal Opening. He's very old. With one glance, you can tell that he's got some desperate technique stashed away."

Chen Changsheng fell silent at these words. He thought, this sort of opponent seems inferior to Zhou Ziheng, but his experience in battle is far greater than Zhou Ziheng's. He's not that easy an opponent to deal with.

He asked, "What time did you arrange the match with the opponent for?"

Tang Thirty-Six was a little taken aback, asking, "What do you mean, 'what time'?"

Chen Changsheng was similarly taken aback, clarifying, "When will we be fighting with that lecturer from the Li Palace Academy?"

Tang Thirty-Six finally understood what he meant and very casually replied, "The fight's already finished."

Chen Changsheng didn't hear it clearly, so he asked, "Finished?"

"Yes, it's finished."

"Eh..." This was completely beyond Chen Changsheng's expectations. For a moment, he was at a loss for what to say.

Xuanyuan Po found it impossible to continue calmly studying as he looked over in shock.

Even for Zhexiu laying on the ground, he couldn't help but perk his ears.

"Who fought?" The answer was obvious, but Chen Changsheng still didn't quite believe it.

Tang Thirty-Six felt that he was quite the idiot and said, "It was me, of course!"

Xuanyuan Po was so simple and honest, he had really believed that Princess Luoluo must have returned. Hearing this admission, he inadvertently let slip the question, "You...could you beat him?"

That lecturer from the Li Palace Academy was at the peak of Ethereal Opening. Tang Thirty-Six had just entered the upper level of Ethereal Opening in the Mausoleum of Books, so how could he possibly be a match for that lecturer?

"Just what does that mean? Chen Changsheng can surpass cultivation levels to defeat Star Condensation, but I can't even take care of some rotten old man?"

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "Seeing my free and easy bearing like a jade tree in the wind, my appearance so confident and carefree that not even rain could stick on me, all of you should also know just who won."

The library was completely silent.

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say.

In the Ivy Festival and the Grand Examination, in terms of both cultivation and swordplay, Tang Thirty-Six was clearly somewhat inferior to the likes of Qi Jian and Guan Feibai, let alone Gou Hanshi. As the talented descendant of an aristocratic family, he ended up being so suppressed by these Mount Li Sword Sect disciples from impoverished backgrounds that he couldn't even breathe, couldn't even raise his head...Chen Changsheng knew that although Tang Thirty-Six acted as if it was nothing, as if he was still free and uncaring, wealthy and headstrong with a mouth full of obscenities, in reality, he was very much irritated by his situation.

So in the Mausoleum of Books, Tang Thirty-Six had been exceptionally diligent and hardworking. Ultimately, he was able to catch up to and even surpass Guan Feibai, and then shockingly directly entered the upper level of Ethereal Opening.

But Chen Changsheng had not imagined that he would actually have made such a great leap that he could defeat a senior at the peak of Ethereal Opening.

He glanced over Tang Thirty-Six and, upon confirming that he truly was uninjured, asked, "What was the situation in the end?"

Tang Thirty-Six sat cross-legged on the floor. His clothes were a little damp and his hair still had a few drops of water.

He did not immediately answer Chen Changsheng's question. He spent a few moments in silence before saying, "I cut off one of his hands."

Chen Changsheng took a few of his own moments of silence, then replied, "A little severe."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "I have to make the opponent pay some sort of price...or else what would we do if we got a letter of challenge every day? Are you just going to keep fighting? If you were to make a mistake once, they would also dare to just cut off your hand."

He spoke calmly and firmly because this was something he knew was absolutely going to happen.

Chen Changsheng noted that his face was rather pale, and then he remembered, although Tang Thirty-Six upon entering the capital had yelled that he was going to cripple Tianhai Ya'er, in reality...he had lived his entire life in Wenshui, growing up with a

golden spoon in his mouth. Upon coming to the capital, he was under the care of Principal Zhuang. Only after he left the Heavenly Dao Academy and came to the Orthodox Academy did he truly begin to confront the trials and tribulations of human life. Just when had he ever actually crippled someone? Besides the battles of the Grand Examination, he hadn't even seen blood before.

Chen Changsheng did not voice any of these thoughts. Taking out a handkerchief, he handed it over and said, "Wipe."

Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat stunned and Xuanyuan Po was exceptionally stunned. Even Zhexiu mustered the strength to open his eyes.

They were the people in the world most familiar with Chen Changsheng. They all knew that Chen Changsheng was exceptionally serious and had an obsession with cleanliness that he did not usually display.

"Just for the rain water." In a rather more serious tone, Chen Changsheng explained, "If you want to use it to wipe the blood on your sword, then you don't need to return the handkerchief to me anymore."

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Tang Thirty-Six's hand was heavy, but the rains of summer were

even heavier. The drizzle of the morning suddenly transformed into a torrential downpour at dusk. The bloodstains in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate were very quickly washed away. Besides making the maidens of the capital think him even more cool, and thus making them even more smitten for him, this matter had no lasting effects, for either the Orthodox Academy or its opponents.

On the morning of the second day, the Orthodox Academy received three more letters of challenge. Unlike the day before, the Orthodox Academy's gate remained shut. Only the faint sounds of debate and even quarreling could be heard. Finally, at twilight, the gate was pushed upon. Watching as Tang Thirty-Six walked out of the gate, the spectators that had waited for the entire day—the idlers, the stewards under the awning, and the people in the carriages on the street—were all roused from their stupors.

Today was truly different from yesterday. There was no pouring rain today, only a sky suffused with the glow of the sunset.

The Wenshui Sword was pulled out of its sheath, the sword reflecting the twilight. Simultaneously, it seemed to possess a sort of magic, completely absorbing the light of the sunset in the west. The street grew dark and then brightened once more.

Tang Thirty-Six had used the mightiest move of the Three Forms of Wenshui!

As the evening clouds gathered, the sword intent rose up.

The remnants of the rain in the numerous depressions in the

ground before the gate seemed like countless tiny lakes.

With the majestic rise of true essence, a vast and mighty sword energy emerged. Those lakes were suffused with a golden glow and then vanished in the heat.

In the lane, there was a dense cacophony like a sword harshly whistling through the air countless times!

That swordsman who on the surface seemed to come from the Temple Seminary, but was actually an expert of the Tianhai clan, plunged backwards and heavily fell on the street.

With a slap, those small lakes were pulverized by some figure, and the golden light transformed into countless scales.

That swordsman's body was crisscrossed by ten-odd sword slashes. Blood flowed out everywhere and he was powerless to stand.

Tang Thirty-Six didn't even pay him another glance.

Grasping the Wenshui Sword, he looked into the crowd and said, "Next."

The crowd was absolutely silent, and then spread apart with a bang.

They were struck silly, especially those maidens of the capital. They shouted his name with all their might while tossing over the flowers in their hands.

Flowers were thrown in an unending rain to the area in front of the Orthodox Academy. The ground was soon covered in a thick layer, like a sea of flowers.

And he stood amidst this sea of flowers.

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Chapter 461 - The Start Of The Drowning

One summer's day this year, Tang Thirty-Six severed the hand of that lecturer from the Li Palace Academy. On the next day, he used a single strike to heavily injure that expert from the Tianhai clan and then won two more matches after that. On the third day, he cleanly and neatly won two more matches. On the fourth day, he won another match as easily as taking a walk on a fine day. On the fifth day, like a tiger swallowing up ten thousand li, he won four matches in a row. All in all, he represented the Orthodox Academy in twelve matches without suffering a single defeat.

The area in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate had become a sea of flowers. For the first time, the reality of the Hundred Flowers Lane finally coincided with its name. Even more joyous were the peddlers hawking flowers outside the lane and the bankers of the Four Great Markets that were taking bets. No matter how the odds changed or the contents of the bets adjusted, as long as people paid more and more attention, a businessman could always derive great profits from it.

Everyone was discussing just how long Tang Thirty-Six could keep up his unbroken stretch of victories. Simultaneously, they also discussed how the commentary the Divination Elder had given on this talented and famous young master of the Wenshui Tangs during last year's announcement of the Proclamation of Azure Sky was truly accurate. As long as he diligently cultivated, his cultivation and strength truly could easily rise by leaps and bounds, crossing a thousand li in a single day. There were even some that began to ponder, if there were a changing of the ranks this year in the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, just where would this seventeen-year-old end up?

As he had done for the past few days, Tang Thirty-Six stood amidst the sea of flowers, his expression calm, as if he wasn't moved in the slightest by this beautiful scene and the cries of those maidens. Meanwhile, his mind was occupied with rather trivial concerns—the past few days had been rather hot and the flowers brought in by those peddlers from the hills were a bit too lush. Standing in the sea of flowers, he felt like he was standing in a pile of fat and tender marbled pork.

"Truly extraordinary." From the crowd came a cold and indifferent voice. "I'm very interested to see, if there is a change in the rankings for Golden Distinction, just where you will be able to rank."

Along with this voice, a man dressed in black, his body exuding a chilly atmosphere, slowly stepped up to the gate of the Orthodox Academy.

This was a question that many people in the capital were curious to know the answer to, but no one could ask this question as well as this man, nor as forcefully. Because this black-clothed man was an expert of the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, ranked twenty-seventh and at the initial level of Star Condensation. His surname was Mu and his name Laoban, and he was called [Mu Laoban](#). In fact, he truly was the owner of a business involved in graves and tombs.

(Mu '墓' means grave/tomb, and Laoban '老板' means boss/business owner, so his name literally translated to 'Grave Boss'.)

Mu Laoban grew up in the south, in the Youling region. He cultivated in the sinister earthfire and his fighting techniques were strange and inscrutable. Even experts on the same level of cultivation found it hard to obtain victory against him in a one-on-one match. He was an honored guest of the Tianhai clan, just like Zhou Ziheng, and he also had the identity as a teacher of the Temple Seminary. As a result, he had the qualifications to challenge the Orthodox Academy!

Upon Mu Laoban's arrival, the temperature around the Orthodox Academy's gate instantly dropped quite a few degrees and a few hints of chill appeared from out of nowhere in the height of summer.

The crowd subconsciously edged outwards and the cries of maidens transformed into concerned whispers.

Those people who came forward to challenge the Orthodox Academy today were all people that had sent over letters of challenge the night before. Tang Thirty-Six cared little about this person's appearance and he had already made ample preparation. He knew that he was not Mu Laoban's opponent because he was not a freak like Chen Changsheng, able to surpass cultivation levels and defeat a Star Condensation expert.

Thus, he was not prepared to fight this person. He removed from his bosom a thick pile of silver banknotes.

"In one year, the Tianhai clan gives you three thousand taels of silver and one bag of crystals. At the moment, I don't have any crystals on hand, only thirty thousand silver banknotes."

Precisely as had been described in the report delivered by the Heavenly Fragrance Market, when Mu Laoban saw that thick stack of silver banknotes, his face immediately changed. His eyes grew bright and blazing and even the cold and sinister aura around him seemed to be greatly cut back. Just as expected of the extremely greedy, Tang Thirty-Six thought with a smile on his face as he watched the struggle taking place on Mu Laoban's face.

He then thought of how he had only needed one roast chicken during the Grand Examination to settle Zhexiu, and then he thought, with my exquisite bone structure and unique bloodline, I really am a genius at business.

At this scene, the spectators were all stupefied as they thought, you can also do it this way?

What made Tang Thirty-Six rather regretful, but made the spectators all the happier, was that Mu Laoban was ultimately able to resist the allure of money.

"I really do love money, but there are still many things in this world more important than it." Mu Laoban sighed at Tang Thirty-Six with sorrow. "You understand."

Tang Thirty-Six understood. To a vile and lowly man like Mu Laoban, something more important than money was naturally not anything like justice or promises. The only possibilities were that the Tianhai clan had some dirt on him, or else had more money.

Mu Laoban took from his disciple a black short spear and walked to the edge of the sea of flowers.

The short spear was forged from essence iron. For some reason, it was especially short. Presumably, the spear technique he used in battle was extremely sinister, but the most sinister was the terrifying poison dying the tip of the spear.

"Is this also okay?" Tang Thirty-Six yelled at the tea house across the lane.

The Li Palace priests had the duty of ensuring the Orthodox Academy's safety, but the person who truly had the qualifications to judge what was fair and unfair in the All-School Martial Exhibition...was in that tea house.

There were very few people in all of the capital who were aware of the fact that in the past few days, Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons Mao Qiuyu and Archbishop of the Hall of Subjugation Daoist Siyuan would sometimes sit in that tea house and drink tea.

No voices emerged from the tea house, indicating that Daoist Siyuan and Mao Qiuyu did not believe that the spear dipped in poison was against the rules.

Mu Laoban gazed at Tang Thirty-Six and chuckled, those white teeth in his fishy lips like the fossils of animals in the deepest depths of the ice. His voice was similarly cold and threatening. "Please."

"Please your ass," Tang Thirty-Six replied.

Mu Laoban's expression flickered and the sinister chill in his eyes grew stronger. "Could it be...the Orthodox Academy wishes to concede?"

"Idiot, the Orthodox Academy has more than just me."

Without any hesitation, Tang Thirty-Six sheathed his sword, turned, and walked to the gate, yelling, "Hurry and come out! This guy isn't willing to take money. I can't do anything else."

The gate was pushed open and Chen Changsheng walked out. As he crossed paths with Tang Thirty-Six, he couldn't help but grumble a little.

"Back when you said you could solve this, is this what you were talking about?"

"What did I do wrong? Drowning! When an army comes, you need a general to block it, and if the flood comes, the earth drowns it out. But not even thirty thousand taels worth of silver banknotes could drown that greedy guy, and it's not like I can beat him. So it has to be you."

(‘When an army comes, you need a general to block it, and if the water comes, the earth keeps it out’ is a Chinese idiom meaning that every problem has its corresponding solution.)

Chen Changsheng stopped and said rather helplessly, "Can we not do it?"

Tang Thirty-Six very indifferently spread out his hands. "Don't forget what we discussed."

Chen Changsheng nodded.

Over the past few days, it had seemed like only Tang Thirty-Six himself was going up to fight. The truth of the matter was that every night, they would meet in the library to discuss the next day's opponents. Even the heavily injured Zhexiu would occasionally offer a few incredibly incisive opinions. Together with the incessant flow of information from the Wenshui Tangs and the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, they were able to produce those twelve successive victories that shook the capital.

But they would eventually encounter an opponent that both he and Tang Thirty-Six would find impossible to handle. What would they do then?

They had established a single principle: no matter the outcome of the battle, they were not allowed to receive any irrecoverable injuries, such as damage to the sea of consciousness or Ethereal Palace, or a severed arm. As for any other injuries, there was not much need for concern. The Li Palace had sent over the cardinals with an extremely profound understanding of the Sacred Light technique to keep watch over the Orthodox Academy. Any minor injury was no problem whatsoever.

Seeing Chen Changsheng appear on the stone steps, the silent crowd suddenly exploded into cheers even louder than before.

Tang Thirty-Six, just about to enter the Orthodox Academy to rest, couldn't help but angrily mutter to himself upon hearing the cheers behind him.

In the twelve successive victories of the Orthodox Academy over these past few days, Tang Thirty-Six had been able to bloom with an unprecedented splendor, such that the people of the capital had even somewhat forgotten Chen Changsheng's existence. Only when he splendidly took the stage once more did they remember that it was he that was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, it was he that was the most crucial figure, nay, the linchpin, of the Orthodox Academy's revival. And as everyone knew, it was he that was the strongest of the Orthodox Academy, even once surpassing cultivation levels and defeating the Star Condensation expert Zhou Ziheng...

Mu Laoban's complexion became more downcast. His eyes fixed upon the figure on the stone steps, he said, "Should I feel honored, or should I feel sorry in your place, Principal Chen?"

Chen Changsheng did not answer him. Placing his sword before him, he said, "Please."

Mu Laoban's face grew solemn as he slowly raised up that short black spear that was only two feet long.

Chapter 462 - Three Swords Break The Divine Armor

With a buzz, a stream of turbulence abruptly appeared around the forward part of the black spear, the result of the spear tip shaking so quickly that it deformed the air.

With a whistle, the sharp spear tip pierced through the turbulence. Imbued with an unimaginable strength and speed, it stabbed at Chen Changsheng.

Truly worthy of its reputation for being sinister and harsh, Mu Laoban's attack had actually struck out without the slightest warning and was exceptionally strange.

‘Strange’ did not mean it was lacking in strength. Countless petals were lifted up from the ground by the Qi and rushed towards the stone steps along with the spear. The area in front of the Orthodox Academy was filled with pink and white petals, blocking Chen Changsheng's vision and also blocking the view of many spectators.

The crowd only knew that the short spear was behind that sea of flowers.

The petals dancing in the air were rapidly blackening, signifying that the poison on the spear had contaminated them.

In a flash, this so-called martial exhibition had become

incomparably dangerous. Everyone's hearts leaped into their throats.

The spear stabbed through the sky of raining petals, its strange movements charting out a slender and speckled snake shape in the sea of flowers.

Yet no matter how strange the trajectory or movement of this short spear was, it was incapable of breaking through Chen Changsheng's sword.

Because it was the Stupid Sword that not even Su Li had been able to successfully train in.

Only a clumsy swordsman could successfully train in the world's number one defensive sword technique.

Bong!

In fact, the sharp spear tip coated with poison had already struck Chen Changsheng's sword innumerable times.

Back in Xunyang City, not even Painted Armor Xiao Zhang's spear had been able to overcome this technique, let alone this spear.

But the tip of this short spear was coated in a terrifying poison. Could this poison be transferred to Chen Changsheng's body through the sword?

Mu Laoban thought so. In these many years, he had been able to obtain victory over so many opponents who were not all inferior to him precisely because as the battle continued, the cold poison coating his spear would be carried with the wind and scattered at random. Noiselessly, it would destroy his opponent's weapon, and then through the weapon and even the air, it would intrude into his opponent's heart and meridians. Ultimately, his opponents would find themselves without the strength to continue the match.

Today, none of this would occur.

Chen Changsheng's seemingly ordinary sword that just seemed a little bright actually contained the unimaginable might and energy of a dragon! How could it be damaged by human poisons?

The sword was named Stainless and it was naturally for a reason.

The sword had no problems and the person would also have no problems, because the person was also stainless.

Chen Changsheng was an expert in the medical arts. Yesterday, upon receiving the report from the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, he had made the appropriate preparation. Even if he had not taken medicine beforehand, the poison on the spear would still be incapable of injuring him in the slightest. His body had once been the dwelling of the Black Frost Dragon's spiritual soul, and it also had been bathed in that Black Frost Dragon's true blood and its strength now far surpassed that of a body obtained through

perfect Purification. From a certain standpoint, rather than comparing his physique to that of a powerful human, it would be better to say that it was like the body of an actual dragon...

Unless it was a poison on the level of Nanke's Peacock Plume, how could this supposedly highly toxic poison from Youling in the south possibly be a match for him?

The petals rained down, the spear and sword parted, and Mu Laoban revealed his shocked and perplexed eyes.

Chen Changsheng used the Yeshe Step, transforming into an afterimage and arriving before him.

With an explosive cry, Mu Laoban retreated backwards. Simultaneously, his black short spear pulverized countless petals. A barrier formed of pink, white and black appeared before him.

This was his Star Domain.

After the battle with Zhou Ziheng, the entire continent knew that Chen Changsheng possessed the ability to surpass cultivation levels and battle with Star Condensation cultivators. Mu Laoban did not dare to hold back. It was very obvious that he had derived the lesson from Zhou Ziheng's battle to retreat firmly and resolutely. Even more importantly, he had displayed his Star Domain extremely early and extremely quickly. Before Chen Changsheng had even taken out his sword, Mu Laoban had already enveloped himself in his Star Domain.

He and many people continued to insist that the iron law of the cultivation world was an iron law. Chen Changsheng had been able to break through Zhou Ziheng's Star Domain in one stroke because Zhou Ziheng's mind back then had been in chaos, or perhaps because Chen Changsheng's sword had been too sharp, his luck too good. He believed that his Star Domain was firmer and more powerful than Zhou Ziheng's. Crucially, he believed that as long as he was prepared, he would not panic. As a result, he did not believe that Chen Changsheng would be able to so easily break through his Star Domain today. However, how could he and those people that continued to cling to the so-called iron law possibly understand Su Li's genius? That it was simply impossible to tie down his ingenious and profound thoughts? How could they possibly know what the so-called Intellectual Sword was?

The Intellectual Sword truly was not a sword technique, but a method of fighting.

When the petals on the floor in front of the Orthodox Academy had risen up to the sky like a waterfall in reverse, when the sinister spear had thrust through the rain of flowers, when Chen Changsheng had raised his sword to confront—

He had already displayed his Intellectual Sword.

This sword had risen up with the calculations he had performed last night, and now it fell amidst this rain of flowers.

A flash of light appeared in front of the Orthodox Academy, like a bolt of lightning.

The Stainless Sword seemingly stabbed at the sky above the rain of flowers, but it ultimately pierced through a soft petal.

But behind that soft petal about the size of a fingernail was Mu Laoban's eye.

Just like that, Chen Changsheng had easily found the weakness of his Star Domain.

The technique Chen Changsheng had used was the simplest True Sword of the Orthodoxy, but at this moment, it was the most suitable technique.

The dagger pierced through the petal and stabbed at Mu Laoban's eye.

In the eye appeared an expression of shock, but he did not notice it. Even deeper within, there seemed to be some other emotions.

With a harsh howl, he rose up.

With a soft squelch, the Dragoncry Sword plunged into his abdomen.

Yet unlike the fight with Zhou Ziheng, the incomparably sharp Dragoncry Sword could not pierce through his body, but was rather blocked by some object.

Feeling the peculiar reaction from his sword, Chen Changsheng narrowed his eyes.

Mu Laoban's clothes concealed a flexible armor.

The problem was, what sort of flexible armor in this world could block his sword?

He was still lacking in experience. If it were Tang Thirty-Six, he would have already guessed that the flexible armor under Mu Laoban's clothes was one of the Tianhai clan's closely guarded treasures, the Six Protections Divine Armor.

The Six Protections Divine Armor was a divine artifact ranked seventy-ninth on the Tier of Legendary Weapons. It was rumored that it had been a treasure of the Tianliang Wangs, but was later on brought into the palace by Emperor Taizu. After that, it was said that Emperor Xian, worried that the Tianhai Empress's enemies were plotting against her in the Hundred Herb Garden, sent her the armor to protect her. When the Empress cultivated to the Saint Realm, she no longer needed any defensive measures, so she sent it to her father, who back then had not yet returned to the sea of stars. From that moment on, the Six Protections Divine Armor had been stored in the Tianhai estate. Now, it was probably being worn by Mu Laoban.

It must be said that the Tianhai truly had invested massive capital this time. No wonder Tang Thirty-Six's thick stack of silver banknotes had been unable to entice the avaricious Mu Laoban.

Worthy of being one of the divine artifacts on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, the Dragoncry Sword had been unable to pierce through it one stroke. Chen Changsheng's sword technique had been halted halfway.

The terror in Mu Laoban's eyes instantly transformed into a berserk killing intent.

With a howl, his short spear fiercely thrust out at Chen Changsheng's throat.

Even more frightening was that as his spear energy violently rose up, it was able to swiftly reconstruct his Star Domain, trapping Chen Changsheng within.

Logically, the most important technique of a Star Condensation expert was the Star Domain. It was normally absolutely impermissible to allow one's opponent entrance into one's Star Domain, but the situation now was very unique. Yes, it must be admitted that the iron law of the cultivation world was invalidated under Chen Changsheng's sword. So he might as well use the Star Domain to trap Chen Changsheng and fight him head-on.

The people that had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy in the last few days were all extremely well-researched on Chen Changsheng, especially pertaining to his first match with Zhou Ziheng. Everyone could see that the sword intent he had received from Su Li was incomparably exquisite, his swordplay enormously complex, as vast as the ocean. Although his Yeshe Step was

incomplete, it was enough to help his body move like a flash of lightning. However, Chen Changsheng had a massive weakness.

He was still not fully sixteen and only a youth. He had fixed his Fated Star and begun to cultivate barely a year ago. Even if he were the reincarnation of Zhou Dufu, the amount of true essence in his body could not compare to those experts that had cultivated for several decades, or even several centuries.

And this was without anybody knowing that his meridians had problems, their efficiency at outputting true essence incredibly disastrous.

In brief, Chen Changsheng's greatest weakness was his lack of true essence.

Yet there was one thing Mu Laoban did not know. At the same time, he had also forgotten a few things.

In Xunyang City, Liang Wangsun had used a similar method to deal with Chen Changsheng. If Chen Changsheng was really so lacking in true essence, how was it in the Grand Examination that he had been able to withstand the storm of blows from Gou Hanshi? In Xunyang City, how had he been able to break through Liang Wangsun's Star Domain? If Liang Wangsun's Star Domain could not hold, was there anyone at Star Condensation and below that could hold him?

There were many people under the awning that believed that Chen Changsheng might lose this battle. One by one, they stood up

in shock.

The people in the tea house, as well as the people in those carriages quietly sitting on both ends of the street, did not think this way. They knew and would not forget Chen Changsheng's feats in Xunyang City. They were keenly aware that Chen Changsheng possessed the ability to escape this trap. This battle was still far from over, and the winner and loser had yet to be decided.

However, what happened next was something that not even they had imagined.

Chen Changsheng did not choose to use the Intellectual Sword to break Mu Laoban's Star Domain. He did not choose to retreat and then plan.

His Stainless Sword was still pierced into Mu Laoban's abdomen, and then it continued forward.

It was as if the idea of escaping had never been on his mind, as if he did not care that under Mu Laoban's clothes was the Six Protections Divine Armor, a divine artifact of the Tier of Legendary Weapons. It was as if he only thought of victory.

Crack!

A blazing Qi suddenly appeared in front of the Orthodox Academy. Mu Laoban's cold and sinister Qi was like ice and snow

encountering the fierce sun, instantly vanishing without a trace.

The petals dancing in the air actually began to blaze, transforming into a dazzling light.

Mu Laoban's face was pale under the light. Surrounded by it, he could vividly sense that intense and blazing Qi...Chen Changsheng was incomparably boundless.

His true essence was insufficient...this fact had turned out to be a facade.

His expression abruptly shifted. Now it was filled with an absolute terror. With a terrified cry, he no longer had time to attack with his spear, instead swiftly retreating backwards like his life depended on it.

But Chen Changsheng would not give him any chance. The Stainless Sword in his hands pierced through the abdomen and emerged through the other side.

The intense sword intent completely annihilated any fighting spirit Mu Laoban had. That terrifying power directly shot him away from that sharp dagger.

A muffled boom like thunder resounded through the area in front of the Orthodox Academy.

Mu Laoban, a black silhouette, flew backwards several dozen

zhang.

The awning on the street had an array in front of it to serve as a barrier.

He rammed against this array, then slumped to the ground, no longer able to stand up.

The air in front of the awning faintly began to give off blue rays of light, and it was even possible to hear the sounds of tearing. Dust fell from the beams of the awning, caking the heads and faces of those sitting below.

Mu Laoban sat paralyzed on the ground, incessantly vomiting blood, his eyes brimming with terror and shock.

Just what was going on here? How could Chen Changsheng's true essence have become so powerful and explosive in such a short time?

The people under the awning were similarly shocked to the extreme. Without any concern for the dust on their bodies, they stared at Chen Changsheng with mouths agape.

His single attack had almost shattered the protective array!

Chapter 463 - This Summer, Let's Watch the Orthodox Academy

This battle had lasted for an extremely short time, even shorter than Chen Changsheng's battle on the first day with Zhou Ziheng. Everything had happened so quickly that the ordinary populace found it simply impossible to clearly make out what had happened. Chen Changsheng's sword had seemingly paused in front of Mu Laoban's chest for only an instant, and it was simply impossible for them to know that Mu Laoban's clothes concealed a legendary suit of Divine Armor from the Tier of Legendary Weapons. They could only see Chen Changsheng attack, pierce through his opponent's abdomen, and then send his opponent flying out of the street. As a result, they inevitably regarded Mu Laoban with some disdain. They thought, even if your strength is inferior to Little Principal Chen's, but you already knew how he defeated Zhou Ziheng, could it be that you made no preparations whatsoever? If you did prepare, then you losing in the exact same fashion is even more unacceptable.

Of course, many people noticed the strange phenomena produced by Chen Changsheng's attack.

That technique of his was like a blazing sun, radiating boundless light and heat, turning the sea of flowers into a sea of flames. What sort of technique was this?

Mu Laoban was in great pain, incredibly weak and perplexed, but he was also thinking of this question. It was plain to see that Chen Changsheng was only at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, so why did he have even more true essence than some Star

Condensation cultivators? And just how had he been able to pierce through the Six Protections Divine Armor? Just what sort of strange technique was this?

The stewards and important figures under the awning were also very shocked. Just what is going on here? they all thought.

A sigh emerged from the tea house, and then it became quiet once more.

In a black carriage at one end of the street, a brush was smoothly and firmly traveling across paper, leaving writing in its wake.

"Chen Changsheng finally used his third sword."

"This sort of fierce sword technique very clearly consumes an enormous quantity of true essence, but unlike what was recorded in the battle at Xunyang City, Chen Changsheng can already use the technique more than once. It seems that he has clearly grown after returning to the capital."

"Mu Laoban wore the Six Protections Divine Armor, but it was unable to block this attack. Besides the sudden explosion of Chen Changsheng's true essence, it also most likely has something to do with the sword called Stainless itself."

The two officials from the Department for Purging Officials faithfully recorded everything they had seen today, and only then placed their inkbrushes down. As they massaged their aching

wrists and looked each other in the eyes, they could easily make out the shock and confusion in each other's eyes. Even if the technique Su Li had taught Chen Changsheng used some secret method to move and ignite true essence, allowing Chen Changsheng to explode with an energy many times more powerful than normal...that was the Six Protections Divine Armor! How could it have been so easily broken through?

"I hear that the Pavilion of Divination has already sent someone to the capital precisely to see the Stainless Sword."

"Could it be that the Tier of Legendary Weapons really might change this year?"

"As said last time, with the appearance of the Stainless Sword, the Tier of Legendary Weapons would have to be updated. It's just that after today's match...I'm afraid that this sword will be ranked even higher now."

The Six Protections Divine Armor was itself a divine artifact of the Tier of Legendary Weapons. Since the Stainless Sword had actually been able to so easily pierce through it, it would naturally be ranked far above it.

The carriage was very quiet. One official suddenly remembered something, took up his inkbrush, and wrote on the paper, "Chen Changsheng still did not kill his opponent."

Yes, Mu Laoban was not dead.

The Stainless Sword had stabbed through his abdomen just as it had done last time, narrowly avoiding the internal organs.

Chen Changsheng's sword was sharp to an almost maddening extent, and it was also precise to an almost maddening extent.

Then just how stable was the hand holding the sword?

Time crawled on until it was finally midsummer. In these dozen or so days, the Orthodox Academy had welcomed dozens of challenges, and so far it had not lost a single one, shocking the capital.

The challengers below Star Condensation level could not beat Tang Thirty-Six, although there were several battles that were absolute nail-biters, and there was even one match where he suffered relatively heavy injuries.

The challengers at the initial level of Star Condensation were all defeated at the hands of Chen Changsheng. By now, everyone knew for certain that although Chen Changsheng had not yet succeeded at Star Condensation, he could already fight on par with cultivators at the initial level of Star Condensation. There were even some people that began to speculate, if he and Qiushan Jun—who had broken into Star Condensation at the beginning of this year—were to fight, just who would be the winner and who the loser?

So far, no expert above the initial level of Star Condensation had challenged the Orthodox Academy, because of the experts at this

level, many had become rulers of a region, making it very difficult for the Tianhai clan to command them. Even if they could, they were honored guests with a relatively high status. As experts, they had to maintain some manner and bearing. If they lowered themselves to challenge Chen Changsheng, then even obtaining victory would be the most shameless of feats.

Most importantly, if the situation really did reach that phase, nobody knew if the ever-silent Pope would descend with a thunderous fury. Of course, even if a middle level Star Condensation expert really did appear, Tang Thirty-Six had already made immaculate preparations. As the steward responsible for all of the Orthodox Academy's external affairs, he had long been waiting for that day to come.

In these past few days, the truly happy one was Xuanyuan Po.

Zhexiu was still in the library, resting and recuperating, but Xuanyuan Po's right arm was finally completely recovered. Under Chen Changsheng's direction, he began to cultivate the Heavenly Thunder Bringer, and his berserk true essence began to wantonly and happily circulate through those meridians of his that were as wide and thick as a main road. He was finally able to completely control his innate divine strength, allowing him to display a destructive strength that could inspire fear in others and cause the trees of the Orthodox Academy to cry out in resentment.

After confirming that Xuanyuan Po could control his strength, Chen Changsheng allowed him to represent the Orthodox Academy in four matches. According to the standards of human cultivation, Xuanyuan Po had not even reached Ethereal Opening,

but was still able to win each match. In his final battle, he encountered an expert of the upper level of Ethereal Opening, but even then he was able to win. Of course, in the final moment, he was forced to metamorphose. He plucked a willow tree in front of the Orthodox Academy and violently used it to smash half of a wall down. This also happened to smash that upper level Ethereal Opening swordsman into unconsciousness.

Such berserk strength, such crude fighting techniques! As for the sparks of lightning scattered amongst the leaves of that willow tree, besides Chen Changsheng, not many people took notice of it.

Back when the Divination Elder placed Xuanyuan Po on the tail end of the Proclamation of Azure Sky, many people had felt it utterly inexplicable, but now, no one thought this way. Seeing that pit in front of the Orthodox Academy where the tree used to be and then seeing the obviously new section of the academy's wall, everyone was only thinking, if the Proclamation of Azure Sky were to change ranks, what of this bear youth who so often brought up his rice bowl and crouched on the stone steps of the gate while giggling away? Just where would he rank?

The summer was the capital's hottest season, and it was also often the time when the capital was most exciting. This summer, the capital was hotter than usual, and it was also more exciting. Every day, there would be something exciting to see in front of the Orthodox Academy. Those celebrities that were very difficult to see normally would appear before you, and then even fight for you, and without charging money or needing tickets! These denizens of the capital that loved to join in on the fun couldn't let this opportunity pass them by. As the weather grew hot, Tang Thirty-Six fixed the time of battle to be in the early morning.

Consequently, every day at dawn's first light, many common folk of the capital would rush over with their bread rolls, their stuffed breads, and their steamed buns. Many people even brought their families along, as if this was some sort of spring outing. Even more ridiculous was the fact that when relatives from elsewhere came to visit, the common folk of the capital would specifically bring them to Hundred Flowers Lane to watch the spectacle. The Orthodox Academy...was on the verge of becoming the newest member of the capital's Six Sights.

The Orthodox Academy had maintained an unbroken string of victories for several dozen matches, and so it was absolutely impossible for its effects on the capital to be limited to merely this. For instance, with regards to the betting on the All-School Martial Exhibition, the Four Great Markets were no longer taking bets on victory or defeat, but instead began to make money elsewhere. Every day, they would take bets for such things as: Who would the Orthodox Academy send out to fight today? What sword style would they use? When would Xuanyuan Po uproot a tree? After Tang Thirty-Six wins today, how many love letters will he receive? And finally, when would Chen Changsheng once more display that fierce technique of his?

One day when the twilight was extremely hot, Chen Changsheng and the other two swam a few laps in the lake, then climbed up the great banyan tree and stared vacantly into the distance.

"It's been a long time since we've seen Princess Luoluo," Tang Thirty-Six gazed at the distant setting sun and suddenly declared, intentionally or unintentionally.

Chen Changsheng was also gazing at that setting sun, and it felt like he could see the galleries of the Hall of Pure Virtue in the Li Palace. Hearing Tang Thirty-Six's words, he said nothing for quite a while, then finally grunted in acknowledgment.

Tang Thirty-Six turned his head to look at him and said, "Tomorrow, go and find her."

Chen Changsheng withdrew his gaze from the distance and lowered his head to gaze at the last strands of golden light on the surface of the lake. After a moment of silence, he replied, "It might be a huge inconvenience for her."

Luoluo was in the Li Palace, in the Pope's Green Leaf World. To come out once was not convenient.

But the fact of the matter was, he had heard that in the past few banquets held in the Imperial Palace, she had appeared for all of them.

Crucially, he had heard that from the beginning of last month, Luoluo would alternate between living in the Li Palace and the Imperial Palace.

The inconvenience was naturally for other reasons.

Chen Changsheng understood, so he had maintained his silence. This was even one of the requests he had asked of her.

Last year, when the Orthodox Academy had just received its newest student, those powerful figures regarded Luoluo entering the Orthodox Academy as the playing of a child. Even the Grand Examination was so—they were all small concerns. But now it was different. The Pope and the Tianhai Divine Empress were gradually drifting apart and Luoluo's status was too sensitive. If she were to remain in the Orthodox Academy or frequently return to it, the small concerns would become a huge affair.

In the capital of the Great Zhou, Luoluo did not represent herself, but rather the eight hundred li of the Red River and the two Saints behind her.

"I don't care, I've been thinking about her."

Tang Thirty-Six stood up and supported himself against the broad trunk of the great banyan tree as he loudly declared this to the Li Palace basking in the setting sun.

Chen Changsheng glanced at him, extraordinarily grateful.

His status was also very sensitive, making it very inconvenient for him to say many things. Tang Thirty-Six said that he was thinking of Luoluo because he knew that Chen Changsheng was thinking of Luoluo, and Luoluo was assuredly thinking of the great banyan tree here.

"I'm also thinking of Princess Teacher Luoluo," Xuanyuan Po said on the side.

He was really thinking about her, nothing to do with Chen Changsheng.

Tang Thirty-Six patted him on the shoulder. "Then tomorrow we can arrange to eat a meal with her. If it's convenient for her, we can bring her back to the Orthodox Academy to take a look around."

Xuanyuan Po was sitting on the same tree branch, but Tang Thirty-Six had to practically stand to reach up to him. For seemingly no reason whatsoever, this picture was rather harmonious.

"Then we'll have to quickly finish tomorrow's two matches. Xuanyuan, there's no need for you to go up. I and Tang Tang will do it." Chen Changsheng had suddenly thought of this problem.

Tang Thirty-Six had also thought of a very important problem. Squatting down and looking Chen Changsheng in the eyes, he said, "I need to talk with you about something."

Seeing his serious expression, Chen Changsheng asked worriedly, "About what?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Tomorrow's match is with a lecturer from the Heavenly Dao Academy's Jiangnan school. His strength is definitely not up to yours, but...can you use a few more techniques?"

Chapter 464 - The Three Heroes Of The Orthodox Academy

"What do you mean?"

"Tomorrow, if you strive to use three moves...no, if you persevere and use four moves and then defeat your opponent, that would be best."

Tang Thirty-Six moved close to his ear and whispered, "There's someone in the Celestial Pole Market that made a big wager, betting that if you appear tomorrow, you won't use more than three moves."

Chen Changsheng was startled, asking, "The Celestial Pole Market is the business group backed by the Pavilion of Divination?"

Tang Thirty-Six nodded his head.

Chen Changsheng asked, "If you do this...won't the Pavilion of Divination get angry?"

Tang Thirty-Six gazed at him as if he was staring at an idiot. "This year, my family took over the Heavenly Fragrance Market. The Celestial Pole Market wants to show their goodwill, so they released this information to us, or else how do you think I got ahold of this information?"

Chen Changsheng was rather shocked, asking, "Could it be that you and the rest of the Four Great Markets have all been colluding?"

"No kidding! How else are we going to make money?"

"This...isn't this cheating those people?"

"Nonsense! When those people throw down their money, isn't that just waiting for people like us to cheat them?"

Chen Changsheng was absolutely speechless. Only after a very long time did he ask rather awkwardly, "How many moves?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Four moves is enough."

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then continued to ask awkwardly, "Then...what percentage?"

Tang Thirty-Six gazed at him as if he was looking at a whole new person. "Pretty good! If I knew beforehand, I would have discussed the price."

Chen Changsheng replied, "When we left Zhou Prison, Zhexiu said he wanted to add money...I think that this money should still come from my end."

Tang Thirty-Six thought it over, then said, "That's reasonable."

Out of the total profits, I'll give you forty percent."

Chen Changsheng thought this was okay and indicated his agreement.

On the side, Xuanyuan Po commented, "I really don't know what Zhexiu and the two of you want to do with so much money. For simple and honest kids like us that live in the mountains, if we have meat to eat and fur skins to wear, we're really satisfied."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and teased, "Seeing your appearance now that doesn't know the meaning of shame, you still have the nerve to call yourself that simple and honest?"

Xuanyuan Po was quite angry, retorting, "Just how am I anything like what you're saying? I could search high and low and not find a person as crafty as you in my hometown."

Chen Changsheng did not want to hear Xuanyuan Po wildly yelling such phrases as 'The capital isn't my home!', or 'My home doesn't even have this many people!' while standing on the great banyan tree. He hurriedly took on the role of mediator, saying, "You really are different from before."

Tang Thirty-Six roared with laughter. "You see, even Chen Changsheng has noticed."

Xuanyuan Po felt extremely wronged.

Chen Changsheng patted his waist and said consolingly, "But I also don't blame you. Anyone who sticks around with someone like Tang Tang for too long would become a little narcissistic, and even forget a little of what shame means."

Tang Thirty-Six's smile instantly vanished into the fires of rage, and it was now time for Xuanyuan Po to heartily laugh.

At this moment, from the other side of the academy's wall opposite the lake came the faint sounds of laughter.

"Hahahaha, quickly come...the three people on top of the tree are the three heroes of the Orthodox Academy."

"What three heroes...Little Principal Chen and Prince Tang sure, but that guy that looks like a bear certainly doesn't count."

"That guy is Xuanyuan Po? That willow tree was the one he pulled out of the ground? Did he pull it out straight or did he do it facing backwards? That guy's like a mountain, just think of how heavy he is! How can that tree stand it? Aren't they afraid it's going to snap?"

"The trees of the Orthodox Academy naturally aren't ordinary trees."

Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six, and Xuanyuan Po were all dumbfounded.

This was not the first time something like this had happened.

Recently, the people that had come to see the Orthodox Academy had been too numerous, especially the many tourists that came from other counties. Without any understanding of the capital's laws, they actually managed to furtively avoid the gazes of the Li Palace priests and Orthodoxy cavalry and stroll through the Orthodox Academy's backyard.

Seeing the academy's walls, they would naturally want to see what the Orthodox Academy looked like. Thus, they would begin to climb over the walls.

The laughter and discussion taking place on the other side of the wall suddenly came to a halt, replaced with the stamping of hooves and cries of reprimand. Presumably, those tourists had all been captured by the Orthodoxy cavalry.

The Orthodox Academy returned to its former peace, but the three suddenly lost all interest in any further chat.

"I don't really like this lifestyle we've been living over the past few days," Chen Changsheng declared.

From the moment he began to cultivate the Dao as a child, he cultivated his heart's desire in pursuit of the Dao of longevity. He had a natural disposition for peace and quiet. Although Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po were at the age in which they loved fun and excitement the most, they also found it all rather annoying. These past few days had truthfully been too exciting,

such that even they almost couldn't stand it anymore. Tang Thirty-Six shook his head and chided, "I said that you should act with a heavier hand, but you refused to listen to me."

In his first match representing the Orthodox Academy, Tang Thirty-Six had severed that Li Palace Academy lecturer's hand with one blow, but at Chen Changsheng's request, he had exercised a much lighter hand in subsequent battles. Gazing at Chen Changsheng, who had his head lowered in silence, he continued, "If...you really did agree with me and kill a few people, it would definitely alleviate the current situation somewhat. You don't kill and won't let me kill, then what do those people have to be afraid of? It's only a given that they would come one after the other. And doesn't the Tianhai clan precisely want to see us run around to and fro until we drop dead from exhaustion?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "But don't you feel that if we keep fighting this way, it might actually help us mature?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "If that's how you think of it, it's not wrong, but...you said it yourself, you don't like this sort of lifestyle."

Chen Changsheng stared into his eyes, saying, "As you said a few days ago, if you can't resolve this problem, you have to change your name."

Tang Thirty-Six was rather irritated and no longer attempted to persuade him. Instead, he silently pondered on what Chen Changsheng had said before, then shook his head and said, "There really must be some problems. For His Holiness to continue to

ignore this matter, we have to look into it."

Chen Changsheng added, "There's something else that I would like you to look into for me."

"What thing?"

"Was Mu Laoban really wearing the legendary Six Protections Divine Armor under his clothes?"

After that battle had concluded, Tang Thirty-Six had told him of this conjecture. Upon hearing his question, Tang Thirty-Six replied, "If there's nothing unusual, then it should be the case."

Chen Changsheng said nothing for a few moments, then asked, "How can we get our hands on the Six Protections Divine Armor?"

When speaking of his conjecture, Tang Thirty-Six had naturally explained the history of the Six Protections Divine Armor, that it had originally been a treasure of the Tianliang Wangs, then it had been confiscated by the Imperial Palace, and it was now in the hands of the Tianhai clan.

Tang Thirty-Six was rather perplexed, asking, "What do you want to do?"

"I want to return it to Wang Po," Chen Changsheng explained. "To thank him for his assistance in Xunyang City."

Tang Thirty-Six said rather unhappily, "I've helped you so much, why haven't you ever thought about giving me anything?"

"Unhappiness, anger, resentment, the urge to kill...once bullied or provoked, these are the emotions that are the easiest to stir."

Tianhai Chenwu stood at the edge of the balcony, looking out at the lake shrouded in fog. He sighed ruefully, "I just wanted to see Chen Changsheng kill someone, whether he was forced into it or it was the result of some sudden impulse. As long as he killed someone, it would be fine. If he kept on killing, if his hands became stained with blood, if he became a person like Su Li, then what qualifications would he have to compete with our people? What possibility would there be of him becoming the next Pope? Who could have imagined that at his tender age, with his powerful strength and luck, he has still been able to completely control his heart. Even now, he still hasn't killed anyone."

He turned to the person sitting at the table and said, "I'm very curious as to just what you think of him."

Chapter 465 - The Encounter At Clear Lake Restaurant

The balcony was the balcony of a restaurant, the table was a restaurant's table, and the restaurant was the capital's most renowned and also most expensive Clear Lake Restaurant. This place was naturally meant for dining, and those individuals worthy to dine with Tianhai Chenwu were a scant few. As it so happened, Xu Shiji was one of these people.

Widely regarded as Chen Changsheng's nominal future father-in-law, Xu Shiji currently had a very complex impression of Chen Changsheng. Last year, the Divine General of the East's estate had gotten covered all over in dirt because of this young Daoist from the countryside, becoming the laughingstock of the entire continent. However, how could he have possibly known beforehand that Chen Changsheng was actually the highly-regarded successor of the Pope? And just how could he have known that Daoist Ji was actually the once incomparably magnificent Principal Shang...every time he thought of this engagement, he would think of many complaints against his father that had long since returned to the sea of stars. There were clearly so many things hidden behind this engagement. Why didn't you explain it all to me before?

His impressions were complex, so his thoughts were naturally also complex, and Xu Shiji's position on this engagement had also become rather difficult to pin down. Upon receiving the invitation yesterday from the Tianhai Estate, he began to think, this Tianhai clan head famous for his profound schemes and deep forethought perhaps wants to force me to take a stand. Consequently, upon arriving at Clear Lake Restaurant, he basically kept his silence,

especially whenever Tianhai Chenwu brought up Chen Changsheng.

Tianhai Chenwu shot him a smile, as if completely understanding what was going through his mind. He indifferently continued, "Shengxue is in the north, diligently cultivating, using battle to improve himself. He has already broken into Star Condensation. At the year's end, he should be returning to the capital to once more view the Heavenly Tome Monoliths."

Xu Shiji did not understand why he would so abruptly bring up Tianhai Shengxue, even though Tianhai Shengxue was the most outstanding youth of the Tianhai clan's third generation and also one of the members of the junior generation most beloved by the Divine Empress.

"In the Grand Examination at the beginning of the year, Shengxue did some things that were simply impossible to hide, but this child was smart and didn't plan to hide anything. Now that I mention it, this is a rather excellent use of the open conspiracy... but his conduct in this matter still makes me somewhat unhappy. If the clan is too big, it's inevitable that everyone within has their own judgments and opinions, but when the clan faces a great pressure, those lonesome opinions have no meaning. We must bring all our strength together, and only through this can we protect the entire clan and continue on the correct path. It's that saying about the overturned bird's nest...if you can't even protect the nest, but are still thinking about protecting your own egg, isn't that just ridiculous?"

Hearing Tianhai Chenwu's easygoing and amusing monologue,

Xu Shiji grew even more serious. It was impossible for him to not understand the ulterior meaning of these words. The so-called correct path was naturally the path where the Tianhai clan replaced the Chen clan and continued their reign over the human world. The so-called discontent towards Tianhai Shengxue was in fact a warning to him, telling him to not have too many other thoughts.

"My aunt has recently not said anything, causing many people in the capital to misunderstand." When he was in the Imperial Palace or at the Imperial Court, Tianhai Chenwu would always refer to the Divine Empress respectfully. Only in the most private of venues would he refer to her as his aunt. This was not some sort of hidden reminder, but a naked display of strength. He turned and stared into Xu Shiji's eyes, saying, "But they have forgotten one thing. My aunt carries the surname of Tianhai. How could she possibly bear to see her entire family be killed to the man?"

Xu Shiji knew that he could no longer continue listening. He commented, "I do not understand why His Holiness has continued to maintain his silence."

This was naturally a reference to that matter that had the entire capital abuzz with excitement: the Orthodox Academy and its matches with all the other schools. Tianhai Chenwu restrained his smile and said, "If everyone does not understand, then there must be a deeper meaning...I've always held the opinion that His Holiness is using this method to make Chen Changsheng mature as quickly as possible. There are even some times where I feel that His Holiness is acting too hastily, pulling up the sprouts in an attempt to help them grow."

Xu Shiji slightly creased his brow as he thought, that petty son-in-law of mine is publicly acknowledged as calm and mature beyond his years. He's not fully sixteen and he's almost at the threshold of Star Condensation. This is absolutely unprecedented in history, and besides my own daughter, there's really no one else that can compare. His Holiness is actually unsatisfied by this and wants him to mature even faster?

"Besides my aunt, who can comprehend His Holiness's intentions?" Tianhai Chenwu slowly said as he turned his head to gaze at the thin fog drifting over the lake.

Xu Shiji was even more perplexed. If the Pope intended to use the Tianhai clan and the new faction of the Orthodoxy to hone Chen Changsheng, why had the Tianhai clan continued to hold back its real methods?

"Starting with Mei Lisha, the Li Palace has always acted as Chen Changsheng's support. If I were to go against this, I would expend far too much energy. Then why don't I just go with the flow? I will let people continuously challenge the Orthodox Academy. If Chen Changsheng can endure through this period, then he will surely progress leaps and bounds in strength, cultivation, and even will. But what if he can't?"

With a derisive smile on his face, Tianhai Chenwu continued, "I know what you are thinking, what many people are thinking. You think that my Tianhai clan continuously sending people to challenge the Orthodox Academy is like sending offerings to Chen Changsheng, like continuing to throw firewood onto a bonfire. There's simply no way to extinguish it, and it's only making the

fire burn ever more fiercely. But did all of you ever think, if there is one day when an enormous tree suddenly falls down, can that fire still continue to burn? Or perhaps, there is suddenly no more wood to add to the fire. This fire that has burned so fiercely for so long—will it be extinguished in such a brief span of time, or will it ravage the forest behind it? Since the Li Palace wishes to support him, I will help them push Chen Changsheng's prestige to the highest peak, then let him collapse with a bang. Until that moment, I wish to see just how Chen Changsheng can possibly bear such a fall, and whether the honing of His Holiness might just hone him into a pile of sand!"

Xu Shiji slightly arched his brow, saying, "To pour oil on the fire often does end with a miserable conclusion, but...if you really do move some powerful experts in the end, I'm afraid the Li Palace will obstruct you."

Tianhai Chenwu shot him a glance, as he thought mockingly, even now, you choose to put up this fake act? I really don't know why my aunt chose you back then.

"There is one person...that can definitely defeat Chen Changsheng, and not even His Holiness could say it is in any way improper, because she's actually a little younger than Chen Changsheng. Similarly, she has also not reached Star Condensation." He lightly said to Xu Shiji, "In a few days, your family's phoenix daughter will return to the capital. My aunt adores your family's phoenix. The whole world knows that the Li Palace wishes to support Chen Changsheng, why can't we support your family's phoenix?"

Xu Shiji understood that today's conversation had finally reached its most critical juncture. After a long period of silence, he lightly said, "She is still young, how can she bear the aftermath?"

Acting as the driving force to bring a halt to the Orthodox Academy's revival, even to bring Chen Changsheng's progress along the path the Pope had made for him to a sudden stop, was not too big a deal to his genius daughter. The problem was that hidden behind this storm over the Orthodox Academy was the struggle of two Saints. Even if Xu Yourong was the embodied reincarnation of the Heavenly Phoenix, she was still not fully mature. How could she possibly endure those storms?

"You must understand one thing! Although it seems like Zhou Tong and many other people have not been doing anything, in reality, they have been acting in coordination with that Saint of the south!"

Tianhai Chenwu stared into the vast and misty expanse that was the lake. When he thought of this matter, even with his high authority and weighty status, even with his callous temperament, he also couldn't help but feel a little yearning. Sighing emotionally, he said, "The confluence of north and south really might succeed this year. It is precisely because of this sort of backdrop that His Holiness and my aunt would appear so calm. The two sides can only bicker for power, but it's inconvenient for them to actually carry out their will, so there's no need for you to be too worried."

The banquet concluded and they descended the stairs.

Patrons of Tianhai Chenwu and Xu Shiji's status naturally did not

take the routes used by ordinary guests. Clear Lake Restaurant had made a path especially for guests like them. Incredibly, in this path in which it was logically impossible for two parties of guests to meet, two parties really did meet.

Tianhai Chenwu and Xu Shiji ran into three youths.

The three youths of the Orthodox Academy.

Chapter 466 - The One Who Blocks The Path Dies

The first person Chen Changsheng saw was Xu Shiji. That cold and solemn face instantly made him recall last year, when he saw that figure in the carriage outside the Heavenly Dao Academy. It was only afterwards that he noticed the middle-aged man in front of Xu Shiji. This middle-aged man seemed to have a heroic spirit about him. Chen Changsheng didn't know who this man was, but given that Xu Shiji was following behind him, he guessed that this middle-aged man possessed an incredibly high status.

He bowed to Xu Shiji. He was a junior, and this was a required courtesy. That he did not take the initiative to speak first was similarly a courtesy. In addition, he really didn't know what to say to Xu Shiji. Granted, Xu Shiji's attitude to him had markedly changed after the Grand Examination—he had even invited him to partake in a family dinner at the Divine General of the East's estate. However, that family dinner had not ended very pleasantly.

That marriage contract's journey, even now, had still not reached its final destination.

Upon straightening his body, he realized that Tang Thirty-Six was bowing to that middle-aged man. This was a very rare occurrence because Tang Thirty-Six had never been one to pay much attention to courtesy. To be more precise, he was a person that despised the overly complex and elaborate customs of the world. Even back when he was before Archbishop Mei Lisha, he had not been so well-behaved.

Tianhai Chenwu gazed at Tang Thirty-Six and asked, "Is your grandfather doing well?"

With his identity as head of the Tianhai clan, there were extremely few people in the world that he was required to inquire about. Even amongst the Wenshui Tangs, only that Old Master was worthy.

Tang Thirty-Six smiled and replied, "His health is particularly good! A letter came from home saying that for every meal, he still eats four bowls of rice, and he never forgets to have his night-time snack."

As he spoke, he was very well-behaved, incredibly similar to a sensible junior. There was none of his usual insolence.

Chen Changsheng was stunned as he thought, just who is this middle-aged man?

At this time, Xu Shiji said to him, "In a few days, Little Rong will return to the capital. When you find the time, come to the estate to have dinner."

As these words rang out, the corridor became incomparably quiet.

Tianhai Chenwu turned to Xu Shiji and slowly narrowed his eyes.

Only then did Chen Changsheng realize that...Xu Yourong was

returning to the capital. After a moment of silence, he responded very courteously to Xu Shiji, "Sir knows that the Orthodox Academy has recently been more busy than usual. I am not sure if I will have the time."

From the moment Xu Shiji spoke, Tang Thirty-Six's eyes had been darting back and forth between Xu Shiji and Tianhai Chenwu, looking to see something.

Tianhai Chenwu gave a smile, which slowly began to fade away. Turning to Chen Changsheng, he said, "You say you're busy, but you have the leisure to come here to eat?"

It was a simple question, but Chen Changsheng felt like it had placed a massive pressure on him. Particularly, the chill in that voice seemed to cause his Dao heart to freeze.

It was at this moment that Tang Thirty-Six's voice, rich with his unique brand of shamelessness, just so happened to rise up. "I hear that Sir greatly enjoys dining at Clear Lake Restaurant?"

He was asking Tianhai Chenwu.

Tianhai Chenwu quietly stared at Chen Changsheng, ignoring the question.

Tang Thirty-Six did not feel embarrassed, chuckling as he continued, "Sir knows, in that match some days ago involving Chen Changsheng and Zhou Ziheng, I won a rather considerable

amount of silver. After gathering some more money from here and there, I managed to pool enough silver to buy this restaurant. Today, we came to receive the restaurant. From tomorrow onwards, Clear Lake Restaurant will have to close down for renovations. In the coming days, Sir might not be able to eat blue lobster anymore."

Tianhai Chenwu turned to him and said derisively, "The child has quite the temper."

Tang Thirty-Six smiled, "I am just informing Sir. In the coming days, when the autumn weather is clear and refreshing, perfect for dining on crab, this restaurant still might not have opened in time. Sir might have to have the steward of your estate seek out another location."

Tianhai Chenwu said to him, "As the years have gone by, there have been fewer and fewer people who dared to provoke me in front of my face. You are worthy of being Old Master Tang's most beloved grandson. Your boldness truly stands out from the masses."

Tang Thirty-Six widened his eyes and feigned innocence. "I don't quite understand Sir's meaning."

Tianhai Chenwu began to laugh, and then sighed, "I just wanted to have the Orthodox Academy experience some excitement. It seems now that I will have to make you all taste a little suffering."

Saying this, he resumed walking forward.

The corridor was not narrow, nor was it wide, especially with Xuanyuan Po's small mountain of a body taking up space.

If Tianhai Chenwu wished to move forward, the three youths would have to give way.

Xuanyuan Po had already sensed that the mood was oddly tense. Seeing that middle-aged man walk over in such a manner, he got very angry and was prepared to use his own body to stand in the way!

However, this was no quarrel amongst the children of the bear tribe, nor was it a game played out by his fellow students of the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression turned cold. His hand shot out like lightning and grabbed Xuanyuan Po's belt. With a surge of true essence, he forcefully dragged Xuanyuan Po and pushed him to the wall.

With a boom, the wall collapsed from Xuanyuan Po's fall, producing a cloud of dust.

Chen Changsheng had long realized that there was something up with this middle-aged man. When Tang Thirty-Six turned to yield the path, he simultaneously did the same.

With his hands clasped behind his back, Tianhai Chenwu

expressionlessly strolled out.

Xu Shiji glanced at Chen Changsheng, then followed him out.

"What's wrong with you!" Xuanyuan Po was seated on the ground amongst the bricks and gravel, simultaneously angered and perplexed. He didn't understand why Tang Thirty-Six had suddenly decided to move against him.

Suddenly, he realized that both Tang Thirty-Six and Chen Changsheng were ignoring him. He inadvertently turned his head and saw more than a dozen tables behind him, every table fully seated with guests.

As it so happened, at the other side of one of the walls of the special corridor was Clear Lake Restaurant's first-floor dining hall.

They had knocked over the wall and so had ended up in the dining hall.

It should clearly have been a bustling restaurant, alive with conversation, but now it was even quieter than the Imperial Palace.

Countless gazes rested on Chen Changsheng and the other two.

Those who were both qualified and wealthy enough to dine at Clear Lake Restaurant were all extraordinary people. Many were officials of the Imperial Court, bishops of the Li Palace, as well as

the most unremarkable, and yet most renowned, young elites.

At present, the Orthodox Academy was exceptionally famous in the capital, and so this clientele would naturally recognize Chen Changsheng's group. Previously when that wall collapsed, many people had glimpsed Tianhai Chenwu's profile. Even earlier, there had even been some people who could faintly hear the argument on the other side.

No one knew completely what had gone on, but they could confirm that Chen Changsheng's group had some sort of conflict with those recently departed personages.

That was no ordinary personage, that was the head of the Tianhai clan.

Whether it was the calm Prime Minister or the Ministers of the Six Ministries, whether it was the Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy or the principals of the Ivy Academies, none of them could compare to that man's soaring power and influence in the Great Zhou Dynasty.

In the aftermath, how could Chen Changsheng and the other two remain unharmed? Although that bear youth called Xuanyuan Po was in a somewhat sorry state, how was he not dead?

Realizing that such a matter had actually concluded in this way, how could these spectators not be shocked, how could they not be speechless?

"Sirs, there's nothing wrong, nothing wrong."

Although his appearance on the stage was not equal to that of a restaurant manager in a story, Tang Thirty-Six really did possess the consciousness that he was the new master of the Clear Lake Restaurant. He clasped his hands to the crowd and smiled, saying, "Continue eating, I'm definitely not letting you all eat for free."

This said, he brought Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po and began to head upstairs. It was at this moment that someone who had managed to catch a few words of the conversation in that special corridor, and of course was very nosey, stood up and asked, "Young Master Tang, is it really true that Clear Lake Restaurant will close?"

Tang Thirty-Six paused. Standing on the steps, he turned his head back to the restaurant and announced, "It truly is so."

Clear Lake Restaurant's dining hall erupted with discussion. Another person asked, "It's soon going to be crab season! Isn't Sir just worrying us to death with this?"

Another person asked, "Young Master Tang, even if you are preparing to close for renovations, shouldn't you also have an estimate for how long it will take? When will the grand reopening be?"

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the crowd, revealing a profound smile. "This will primarily depend on when we can find time to take care of the business."

Hearing these words and thinking of the meaning hidden within them, the restaurant was abuzz with discussion.

Everybody knew that Tang Thirty-Six was a student of the Orthodox Academy. When he said, "when we can find time," this primarily meant when he was in the mood. As for when he was in the mood, that was naturally when the Orthodox Academy was no longer so troubled.

Clear Lake Restaurant was the capital's most profitable and, simultaneously, most costly restaurant. The phrase 'another day, another peck of gold' was insufficient to describe the speed at which this lakeside restaurant made money. Tang Thirty-Six, in order to prevent that powerful figure of the Tianhai clan from dining on blue lobster and autumn crab, was actually willing to part with such a huge sum for such a long time by closing down the restaurant. All the guests could not help but be shocked speechless, thinking to themselves, he's really worthy of being the sole grandson of the Wenshui Tangs. He's truly willful to the extreme.

The sole table by the balcony on the top floor of the restaurant had long been wiped clean, a dozen or so dishes of fresh fruits and vegetables laid out as appetizers atop it. There were also three kinds of young tea leaves that one could enjoy at their leisure. Xuanyuan Po had never experienced this sort of thing before. Seeing those precious porcelain dishes that had all come from various famous kilns, he felt himself in a rather tricky situation. They're so thin, if I'm not careful, what happens if I break them? They're so white, if I'm not careful, what happens if I dirty them?

"In this case, you were truly a bit too willful," Chen Changsheng shook his head and said to Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered. "That old man loves nothing more than to eat blue lobster at Clear Lake Restaurant. The problem is, he made my mood sour, so just why do I have let him be happy!?"

Chen Changsheng chided, "But that doesn't mean you should stop treating silver as silver."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "I'm relatively rich."

This was stated very calmly and indifferently. There was no sense that he wished to brag, only to explain. Only this way could it make Chen Changsheng speechless, and at the same time, it made him think of last year in the Plum Garden Inn when he first treated Tang Thirty-Six to a meal. He also recalled that it was then that Tang Thirty-Six told him that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were companions in making other people speechless. He couldn't help but chuckle and shake his head.

"Right, that person...just who was he?" it was only now that he recalled this important question.

"Tianhai Chenwu, the current clan head," Tang Thirty-Six explained. "The Divine Empress's nephew by blood. In other words, if the Empress decides that she doesn't want to return the title of emperor to the Chen Imperial Clan, he is the one most likely to become the Great Zhou's next emperor."

Chen Changsheng finally realized that he had been such an important figure.

Xuanyuan Po awoke from his stupor that had been induced by the luxurious furnishings of the restaurant's top floor. Thinking of what Tang Thirty-Six had done to him on the first floor, he grumbled, "Why did you stop me back there? Are you afraid of him?"

Tang Thirty-Six said scornfully, "I'm not afraid of him. I was afraid that if you didn't stand aside, you would have been beaten to death on the spot."

Xuanyuan Po wasn't convinced at all. "With his feeble appearance, I could easily hit him so hard he'd flip three times."

Tang Thirty-Six sneered. "Just how many peak Star Condensation cultivators does my Great Zhou Dynasty have that would let you knock them over? Do you think he's one of those trees by the lake, letting a black bear like you hit them whenever you please?"

Xuanyuan Po was stupefied. It was beyond his imagination that such an ordinary-looking middle-aged man was actually a peak Star Condensation expert.

Chen Changsheng recalled the scene in that corridor, especially the expression Tianhai Chenwu had at the time. He suddenly felt like the wind coming off the lake was exceptionally cold, because there was a chill in his heart—this Tianhai clan head had truly

been prepared to kill.

Chapter 467 - The Bloody Incident Caused By A Plate Of Blue Lobster

If their group of three had refused to stand aside, perhaps Tianhai Chenwu, out of consideration for the Pope and Old Master Tang, would have casually disciplined him and Tang Thirty-Six. However, if it was Xuanyuan Po? It must be known that to these powerful figures, Xuanyuan Po's existence was no different from an ant's.

Chen Changsheng swiftly reached a conclusion: if Tang Thirty-Six had not extended his hand and pushed Xuanyuan Po into the wall, Tianhai Chenwu would absolutely have not minded killing Xuanyuan Po.

He was a peak Star Condensation expert. With the casual wave of a hand, every bone in Xuanyuan Po's body would shatter and he would die on the spot.

Even now, Chen Changsheng was unable to forget his experience in Xunyang City—the frightening power of Liang Wangsun's Vajra Pestle, and the even more terrifying spear of Painted Armor Xiao Zhang. And it was obvious that Tianhai Chenwu, in both cultivation and determination to kill, was stronger, fiercer, and shrewder than Liang Wangsun and Xiao Zhang. Crucially, he was the head of the Tianhai clan. Unless one was a person with a deep backing like Chen Changsheng or Tang Thirty-Six, if Tianhai Chenwu killed a normal person like Xuanyuan Po, was there anyone in the entire continent who would dare give even a word of objection? Even the White Emperor couple wouldn't say anything.

At this point, Chen Changsheng was finally able to rid himself of the chilliness in his heart. He turned to Tang Thirty-Six and seriously said, "Before, didn't you often regard the Tianhai clan as beneath your contempt?"

Tang Thirty-Six had a rather nasty complexion, retorting, "I spoke of my grandfather. Just when was I ever saying it about myself?"

Chen Changsheng contemplated this question, then replied, "Last year when Guardian Jin invited us to a barbecue for the second time, you said it. Later on when you saw Tianhai Shengxue during the Grand Examination, you said it. Afterwards..."

"Okay, just stop already! Is it really so important that you have to take out the strength you used to comprehend the Heavenly Tome Monoliths to recollect?" Tang Thirty-Six said angrily.

Xuanyuan Po looked over and teased, "You would also have teased me! In front of these powerful figures, all your toughness vanished."

Tang Thirty-Six was furious, shouting, "Let me put it straight to the two of you, that was the head of the Tianhai clan! He's not some random nobody! Besides, how was I not tough? Didn't you hear what that old man said before he walked off? Nobody has dared to provoke him in so many years! And who is it now that provokes him? Who is it that won't let him eat the autumn crab or the blue-blooded lobster! Who!?"

Suddenly, the sounds of hurried steps could be heard on the stairs.

Who had come was not today's invited guest of honor, but rather one of the Li Palace priests responsible for guarding the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression grew concerned. Shifting his gaze to that priest, he asked, "What happened?"

The Li Palace priest shot him a somewhat complex glance, asking, "I heard...that Sir talked back to the Tianhai clan head?"

In Tang Thirty-Six's words, it had been a provocation, but in the view of the powers of the capital, he was just a junior of the Wenshui Tang clan. Tianhai Chenwu was absolutely his senior, so Tang Thirty-Six's words had been talking back.

Of course, using the phrase 'talking back' was, from a certain standpoint, also for Tang Thirty-Six to ponder his actions.

"Just say what happened," Tang Thirty-Six said rather impatiently.

The Li Palace priest said nothing, instead taking out a thick stack of envelopes and placing them upon the table. He turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "Principal Chen, please look them over."

With these words, he took his leave.

Chen Changsheng took up the envelopes and opened them, one by one.

The restaurant was abnormally quiet. Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po's eyes were transfixed on that stack of letters.

In truth, they had already guessed at what these envelopes were because, in the past twenty-odd days, the Orthodox Academy had received many similar envelopes.

Just as expected, the envelopes all contained letters of challenge.

In total, there were forty-some letters of challenge.

Chen Changsheng had only hastily skimmed them over. He hadn't been able to see just who these challengers were, but he did feel that this stack of letters was rather heavy.

Before Tianhai Chenwu left, he had said that he originally had just wanted to cause a little excitement, but now he would have the Orthodox Academy taste a little suffering...and the suffering had come very quickly.

How long had it been since that confrontation in the corridor? And already so many letters of challenge had been sent over.

Chen Changsheng could almost see countless letters of challenge

flying into the Orthodox Academy like so many snowflakes.

Twelve consecutive victories? Twenty-some consecutive victories? What use was it, what meaning was there to it? These countless experts could easily drown the Orthodox Academy into nothingness.

It truly was worthy of the distinction as the supreme clan of the present human world.

The Tianhai clan was truly too frightening. Let alone the Orthodox Academy, even the Li Palace would find it rather exhausting to cope with the Tianhai clan.

"If you don't let the other person eat a lobster...the other person will make us eat misery."

Chen Changsheng looked at Tang Thirty-Six and then sighed. "Back then, you said that you wanted to drown them to death. Now it seems like we're the ones about to be drowned to death, so what now?"

He had barely finished speaking when the fragmentary and hurried sounds of footsteps could be heard on the stairs once more. The bead curtain was lifted up, causing the beads to crisply clack, and then came a voice that was as crisp as a bell.

It had been quite a few days since they had last heard this voice.

In the scorching heat of midsummer, the top floor of Clear Lake Restaurant used an array to attract the gentle breeze off the lake. It was refreshingly delightful and made this the most comfortable place in all the capital, so only important figures such as Tianhai Chenwu or the new owner Tang Thirty-Six could make use of it.

The girl that now stood before Chen Changsheng was even more refreshing than the wind off the lake, gladdening his heart.

Luoluo looked at him and gave a little laugh.

Seeing her pure and childish appearance, Chen Changsheng instantly forgot his worries. Chuckling, he asked, "And why are you laughing so foolishly?"

Luoluo boldly declared, "It's been too long since I last saw Teacher. Without Teacher's instruction, it's inevitable that I become somewhat foolish."

As Luoluo said these words, she certainly seemed like no fool. These words concealed unhappiness, and Chen Changsheng, being no fool himself, could identify this unhappiness. As a result, they were forced to act foolishly. If things were as they used to be, Xuanyuan Po would at this point have already gotten down on bended knee in front of Luoluo out of respect, while Tang Thirty-Six would be ridiculing their master-disciple relationship with a sour face. However, now the dining room was very quiet. Xuanyuan Po and Tang Thirty-Six were still staring at the thick stack of letters on the table as if their souls had already taken leave of their bodies. As they thought of how every day, they would have to engage in nonstop battle, maybe not even having time to eat or

use the toilet, they could already imagine the suffering.

Luoluo just then realized that the pair was acting strangely. She asked curiously, "What happened?"

Tang Thirty-Six awoke from his daze. As he turned to Luoluo, his eyes became incomparably bright. "Ah, Your Highness..."

How could Chen Changsheng not know what he was up to? He walked up to the table, took up the stack of letters, and stuffed them into Tang Thirty-Six's bosom. Simultaneously, he obstructed Luoluo's gaze and said, "Have them start serving the food."

Luoluo inquisitively peeked her head out from behind Chen Changsheng's body, looking at Tang Thirty-Six and saying, "What's wrong?"

Tang Thirty-Six looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and understood that were he to request assistance from Luoluo, his life upon returning to the Orthodox Academy would definitely be even more miserable than if he had to take on all those challenges by himself. Thus, he very firmly and naturally changed the subject. "Starting tomorrow, Clear Lake Restaurant will be closed for renovations. Let's eat all the blue lobster they stocked up!"

Chapter 468 - The Most Precious Gift In The World

In today's feast, the principal guest was Luoluo, but in order for her to have a reason to leave the Imperial Palace, several additional guests had also been invited. These included Prince Chen Liu, Mao Qiuyu, and Priest Xin. When drafting the list, Chen Changsheng did not pay any attention to such questions as differences in status or sensitivity of identity. He had just wanted to take the opportunity to also thank those people that had once helped the Orthodox Academy. Prince Chen Liu had come, Mao Qiuyu had not. Priest Xin had come, but upon seeing the other guests and thinking of his own status, dropped off a gift and left first, receiving both Tang Thirty-Six's praise and Xuanyuan Po's incomprehension.

An array of culinary delicacies, plum wine, the lake breeze, and youths.

Prince Chen Liu was the person who was least acquainted with the rest of the group, but he lived up to his reputation as the sole representative of the Imperial clan able to persist in the capital, the sole junior able to be admired by the Divine Empress. His way of speaking was naturally warm and natural, and it was not long before he and Chen Changsheng had warmed up to each other. After the final dish had been served, he thought of the rumors he had heard on the way here and asked in an uncertain tone:

"Is that matter true?"

Luoluo asked curiously, "What matter?"

Prince Chen Liu described the incident in Clear Lake Restaurant and even mentioned what had happened afterwards.

Chen Changsheng saw that he could no longer conceal it. Indicating that Tang Thirty-Six should take out those letters of challenge, he said, "I just feel like this is all a children's game."

Prince Chen Liu glanced at the stack of letters and shook his head. "The little games played by the powerful often have a deeper meaning. Is there anything that I can help you with?"

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then replied, "In the end, this is a matter concerning the Orthodox Academy, so we'll try and handle it ourselves. If we really can't do it, then we might as well go to the Li Palace and request His Holiness for assistance."

Luoluo glanced at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng used his chopsticks to ferry some pickled tofu and spinach onto her plate.

Luoluo understood. With a soft tone, she whispered a 'thank you Teacher', then lowered her head even further, silently continuing to eat.

"Teacher, why is that after all these things happened at the Orthodox Academy, you still won't tell me about it?"

"Are you still used to living in the Imperial Palace? Ah, I forgot. In the very beginning when you first got to the capital, you lived in the Imperial Palace."

"Teacher, was that Zhou Ziheng really in the Star Condensation Realm? Teacher, did you really only need one strike to kill him?"

"Now that I think of it, why is it that Guardian Jin never wants to come into the academy? Is it because he doesn't like all the Orthodoxy cavalry outside?"

"Teacher, is that guy Tang Tang really so strong now?"

"What do you think about Prince Chen Liu? I think he's not bad, but you also know, I don't have many friends, nor am I that good at judging others."

"Teacher, could it be that Tang Tang is even stronger than me now? He shouldn't be! As he's won twelve consecutive victories, if I were to represent the Orthodox Academy, maybe I would just win all the way until the end?"

"For some reason, Tang Thirty-Six has never liked him."

"Teacher..."

Of course, this wasn't because they couldn't see eye to eye, nor was it because he was attempting to avoid the main subject, although Chen Changsheng had actually intended to do so at the very beginning of this conversation. But later on, he thought it was very interesting to converse in this way. Before he entered the Mausoleum of Books, especially in that time period where neither Xuanyuan Po or Tang Thirty-Six had entered the Orthodox Academy yet, this vast academy that occupied an area of one thousand mu contained only him and Luoluo. In those times at dusk, when they would stroll around the lake or laze around atop the great banyan tree, they would also hold these rather interesting conversations.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the golden ripples on the lake and the distant Li Palace. Reaching out his hand, he rubbed Luoluo's head.

In performing this action, he didn't even look at Luoluo, yet his hand accurately fell on her head. It was an action he had performed many times, and Luoluo would always sit in that area.

On the night when Mei Lisha returned to the sea of stars, they had truthfully already foreseen the current situation. When they had met last, they also had discussed this matter. Every person had their own responsibility. The most vexing fact was that it was impossible for every person to be their own person. They all had their own relatives, friends, schoolmates, teachers, and elders, all the way up to the continuation of the country. Thus, it was always impossible for a single person to make their own choice or decision. One would always have to consider the matters of the future, and then also consider the matters of the past.

"I've never avoided my own responsibilities." Luoluo wrested herself away from his palm, then stood up to gaze together with him at the distant Li Palace. "But have none of you ever thought that I'm also a student of the Orthodox Academy, that I also have to bear some of this place's responsibility?"

"Because...above all, you are your parents' most beloved daughter, Her Majesty the Princess adored and respected by the countless demi-humans living along the eight hundred li of the Red River."

Chen Changsheng turned to her and said, "As for the Orthodox Academy, this place still has me and Tang Thirty-Six. There's nothing that you need to worry about."

Upon returning from Xunyang City, he realized that the state of affairs in the capital was extremely tense. The Tianhai Divine Empress and the Pope had begun to show their strengths and many people had begun, or been forced, to pick a side. He did not let Luoluo concern herself with the matters of the Orthodox Academy precisely because he did not want Luoluo to pick a side, because Luoluo, from a certain perspective, represented the position of the entire Demi-human race.

"But..." Luoluo lowered her head to the reflection of the great banyan tree in the lake, as well as her and Chen Changsheng's reflections. "I'm very sad."

Chen Changsheng said soothingly, "Later on, if the situation

clears up a little, perhaps it won't be this sensitive."

Ultimately, he was still just a youth from Xining Village. It was impossible for him to understand that in every case, once something like this began, it would never conclude.

Luoluo was a princess from White Emperor City, so she naturally understood, which only deepened her sorrow.

Chen Changsheng found it rather difficult to see her in such a state. Changing the subject, he said, "In the past few days, Zhexiu and the rest all picked a sword. You should also pick one. Yeah, I still have many good swords."

He thought that since every other person of the Orthodox Academy had chosen a sword that had been brought back from the Sword Pool, it was only natural that Luoluo not be excluded. Moreover, if she were to think that this was a privilege of the students of the Orthodox Academy, perhaps she would be happy. As for which sword Luoluo would pick...he didn't care too much. The reason he had not easily agreed to Mo Yu's request for the Yue Maiden Sword, other than that he really believed he had no obligation to do so, was primarily that he remembered that Luoluo had not chosen yet. He thought that the Yue Maiden Sword and the Flowing Light Sword, these swords more inclined towards female persuasion, should first be left for her. If she didn't want them, they could be taken care of later.

Indeed, upon hearing that every person of the Orthodox Academy had a sword from the Sword Pool, Luoluo grew somewhat happier. However, she did not immediately choose a

sword, instead telling Chen Changsheng to keep it safe for the meantime, and that they would talk about it again in the future.

Chen Changsheng saw the Falling Rain Whip at her waist and suddenly remembered that she was the noble Princess of the demi-humans. She had ten Thousand Li Buttons as well as the Falling Rain Whip and the Emperor's Tusk, divine weapons of the Tier of Legendary Weapons. It was very likely that she wasn't that interested in these once-famous swords.

"Oh, I'm also preparing to give you a small present, if...I can actually obtain it, that is." As Chen Changsheng said this to her, he thought, if I can really go back into the Garden of Zhou and learn that technique of Wang Zhice's, then I'll take all those Heavenly Tome Monoliths around the Mausoleum of Zhou and turn them into little black stones, and then give one to her.

To use the Heavenly Tome Monoliths as a gift...

He had definitely not thought of the fact that if this thought really became truth, then it would inevitably be the most precious gift in all of history.

Chapter 469 - Those Stricken By The Sorrow Of Parting

Luoluo assuredly had no idea what the gift Chen Changsheng spoke of was, but this did not stop her mood improving a little—her teacher would especially give her a gift! This indicated that in Teacher's heart, she was more important than Tang Thirty-Six, Xuanyuan Po and Zhexiu added together! In Teacher's heart, there was no way that she was just a student...right?

Thinking of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths in the Garden of Zhou, Chen Changsheng remembered that very important matter and asked Luoluo what she had found from her inquiries. In the past few days, he had also asked the priests of the Li Palace to help him check, but there was no news from them. He could only place his final hopes upon her.

Luoluo lowered her head, indicating that she did not want to say it.

Chen Changsheng felt his lips were somewhat dry. With a hoarse voice, he asked, "There's no news from the Elf race?"

Luoluo raised her head, confronting his questioning and apprehensive gaze. Biting her lip, she mustered her courage and said, "The elves that remain on the continent all live scattered across the plains. It's very difficult to completely confirm, but there is one thing that can be confirmed. There is no girl of Teacher's description that left the Garden of Zhou."

Chen Changsheng gazed at the fish in the lake, for a long time saying nothing.

Luoluo was rather sad, but she still managed a smile on her petite face. "Teacher, don't panic. I'll have someone go check again."

Chen Changsheng did not hear her words. He mumbled to himself, "I clearly saw her fly into the mountains on top of the Great Peng. The Mountainside Whispering Wood wasn't far, even if she was heavily injured..."

And then, he fell silent.

She was not able to leave the Garden of Zhou.

She could not leave through the same method as he had.

She was probably still within the Garden of Zhou.

Perhaps she was still alive, but it was even more likely that she was already dead.

This was the end.

If life was like the moment when we first met, when she was quietly sleeping on the pile of reeds, how fine it was, because there would always be a time when she would awaken.

Chen Changsheng was heartbroken. This was the first time he had genuinely experienced this sort of feeling. Although there were a few occasions when he thought of the possibility that the girl was no more and felt this feeling, that was just grass under a stone, still not able to tear through the hard surface and reveal itself. Although when he went to the Tong Palace and walked before the Black Dragon, he had also felt this sort of feeling, that was also just a parting. It was completely different from now.

He was parting from this world. The world was parting from him.

It was probably this sort of difference.

And then he remembered, he had promised her that he would do something.

"In two days, I will go to the Divine General of the East's Estate to end the engagement."

Luoluo was rather surprised. Raising her head, she thought to herself, after Teacher entered the capital, he's already gone to the Divine General's estate to end the engagement twice, but failed both times. Last time, Xu Shiji declared that if he still wanted to end the engagement, he should do it in front of Xu Yourong...in a few days, Xu Yourong will return to the capital. Teacher, why are you in such a rush? Why not wait a little longer?

"I promised her...to end the engagement."

Chen Changsheng stared at the fish in the lake, his eyes unblinking. "Since I've confirmed she's no longer here, I even more have to do it. And I have to do it quickly, or else I'm afraid she'll think I was deceiving her."

Luoluo sat in the carriage, looking out the window at the walls of the academy, her face somewhat pale.

No one could understand just how much courage it had taken to deliver that news to Chen Changsheng.

Because she clearly understood that, given Chen Changsheng's temperament, the moment she gave him the news, there would be no more hope for herself.

As expected, Chen Changsheng quickly resolved to go to the Divine General of the East's Estate to end the engagement.

That fiancée of his had no more hope.

Let alone she who was just his student.

Outside the carriage, Jin Yulu seemed to have vaguely sensed something and sighed.

It was this gentle and pitying sigh that caused Luoluo to cry.

She drew down the curtain and sobbed in sadness. She thought to

herself, none of you understand anything.

Those who had departed would always be more important in the hearts of others.

Those who had departed forever would possess an unimpeachable and eternal position in the hearts of others.

She understood this principle. At the age of five, after her beloved grandmother went to her eternal rest in the Red River, she understood.

She knew that she would never be able to defeat that girl who she had never even met, because that girl had already departed.

Or perhaps, only through parting could one really be remembered.

Luoluo raised her head, wiped the tears off her face, and raised the curtains once more. She gazed at the gradually receding trees of the Orthodox Academy.

She knew that the time had come for her to depart.

Teacher, I will definitely make you remember me.

She stubbornly thought.

Tang Thirty-Six noticed that Chen Changsheng's mood today was somewhat off. He asked, "Are you okay?"

Chen Changsheng took the wet clothes out of a basket and hung them up on the clothesline as he replied, "I'm fine."

He didn't want his friends to worry about him. Moreover, he always felt that the memories of that time in the Garden of Zhou were his and hers alone. Thus, he changed the subject, "Back then when His Highness Prince Chen Liu wanted to come to the Orthodox Academy, why didn't you agree?"

Tang Thirty-Six perked his eyebrow and teased, "Oh! I'm not even the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, do I have the right to disagree?"

Chen Changsheng carried the basket and walked into the small building. As he passed, he said, "You might not have said, but that face of yours was so unsightly that it was like..."

He was originally planning to say 'like someone died', but what came out was different.

"...like something big had happened."

"With this handsome face of mine, even if I were to make a face at him, how could it possibly be ugly?"

Tang Thirty-Six took the washboard that he was carrying with

one hand and followed him. "I just don't like that guy. It's not like you don't know."

This was something that Chen Changsheng had never understood. "Just why is that?"

"I just feel that guy's too hypocritical," Tang Thirty-Six answered.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Without solid evidence, don't criticize."

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "You don't think that whether it's this guy's words or actions, he always gives off the feeling of a cleansing spring breeze?"

Chen Changsheng was thoroughly confused. Wasn't this praise? he thought to himself.

"He's a man, what reason is there to assault us all with the spring breeze?" Tang Thirty-Six disdainfully made his verdict: "He must have a plan, and a big one at that. It's better to keep him at a distance."

Chen Changsheng thought it over. These words were truly rather reasonable. However, in the present situation, the Imperial clan had been driven off into the various counties. Besides the Orthodoxy and Zhu Luo, there was no other powerful external aid. For Prince Chen Liu to deliberately forge a good relationship with the Orthodox Academy was also rather understandable.

As the two spoke, they entered the small building. After putting the things down, Chen Changsheng went to Zhexiu's room. Zhexiu's injuries were gradually improving. Although he still could not walk, he could move. In the past few days, they had moved him back to the small building. Chen Changsheng sat at the bedside, attentively reading Zhexiu's pulse. He then took out his needles and began to treat Zhexiu. Only after a very long time did the day's treatment conclude.

Beside him, Tang Thirty-Six looked at Zhexiu's still-pale face in concern and asked, "Just when is he going to fully recover?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "That's dependent on his own vitality."

Zhexiu opened his eyes and said without the slightest emotion, "You guys don't have to concern yourselves over this point."

At this moment, Xuanyuan Po came from the library with a thick stack of letters of challenge.

"This is just the first batch. I heard from Priest Lu that there's still a big pile at the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education. It seems that the Tianhai clan head is truly very angry."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "At his age and with his status, why does he like to get angry like a little kid?"

The blue lobster of the Great Western Continent...in all of the capital, Clear Lake Restaurant was the only place where it could be eaten. Now that the Clear Lake Restaurant had closed for endless renovation, it was naturally much more difficult to eat. If one's beloved food were suddenly impossible to eat, anyone would get angry. Xuanyuan Po imagined what sort of mood he would be in if someone prevented him from eating roast lamb leg on the other side of the lake. He clearly understood and even sympathized with the Tianhai clan head.

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng said, "Just for a plate of lobster..."

With the Tianhai clan's position in the human world, the whirlwind invoked by the Tianhai clan head really was impossible for the Orthodox Academy to stand against. Starting from today, there would definitely be countless letters of challenge descending like snowflakes. Now matter how good the three youths of the Orthodox Academy were at fighting, even if they could win every battle, how could they last through so many matches? Even if they weren't beaten to death, they would probably be exhausted to death. Even if they weren't exhausted to death, they would really be disgusted to death.

As he looked at those letters of challenge, he felt a pain in his chest. Just as he had said yesterday on the great banyan tree, living like this every day was really not the life he wanted to live.

The most troublesome thing was that, amongst this pile of letters, there was one letter that was very heavy. Neither he nor Tang Thirty-Six could take it on.

"Bie Tianxin, once the most powerful expert of the Li Palace Academy. Initial level Star Condensation, but...it's not the initial level Star Condensation of Zhou Ziheng and Mu Laoban. In his year's Ivy Festival and Grand Examination, he only lost to Guan Bai. Many people even suspect that he could have already entered the middle level of Star Condensation, except for the fact that the technique passed down through his family is far too powerful and secretive. As a result, he's temporarily stopped at his current level."

"The technique passed down through his family? He's not a student of the Li Palace Academy?"

"If your family were even more powerful than the Li Palace Academy, if you were you, what would be your final decision?"

"Ah...whose son is he?"

"His father is called Bie Yanghong, his mother is called Wuqiong Bi."

"Ah...his family really is very powerful."

Chen Changsheng did not sigh and say that these two new names were very strange, because even someone as ignorant and ill-informed as him had heard these two names before.

These two names were the same as Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke, all

signifying the storms of the world.

But this was the first he realized that these two Storms of the Eight Directions were originally husband and wife, and that they even had a son.

Chen Changsheng sighed, "Even if we could win, it's not good to win."

If they beat the young one, then presumably the father and mother would come calling.

"Can you not be so narcissistic as me?" Tang Thirty-Six chided. "Just where did you get the confidence that you can beat this opponent?"

Chen Changsheng really wanted to say, whether it was the wilderness outside Xunyang City or these battles in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate, just how many initial level Star Condensation experts have I defeated? And then he recalled that Tang Thirty-Six had said that this initial level Star Condensation was different from an ordinary initial level Star Condensation.

"That Bie Tianxin was unable to defeat Guan Bai back then doesn't mean that his strength was any less than Guan Bai's. You can basically treat the two as having equal strength." Tang Thirty-Six looked into his eyes and said, "You've seen Guan Bai. How much chance do you think you have?"

Chen Changsheng recalled that scholar he had seen on the side of the street and the sword intent he had sensed. After a moment of silence, he affirmed, "Not a single chance."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Then if you want to beat Bie Tianxin, there's also no chance."

On the bed, Zhexiu once more opened his eyes. "I once fought with him before."

The three youths all looked over, asking in shock, "Who won?"

Chapter 470 - The Orthodox Academy's Big Event

"Of course he was the winner." Zhexiu looked at them all like they were idiots.

In the time before he entered the capital, he hadn't even broken into Ethereal Opening. Even though the gifts of his wolf bloodline were special, it was simply impossible for him to beat a Star Condensation expert.

He added, "But if I were to fight him now, I have the confidence."

Tang Thirty-Six asked in surprise, "The confidence to beat him?"

Zhexiu replied, "No, I have the confidence to perish together with him."

The room instantly grew silent. Tang Thirty-Six, his head aching, thought to himself, besides me, these guys of the Orthodox Academy are all freaks! It's really impossible to communicate with them.

Chen Changsheng suddenly looked at him and asked, "Just what do you plan to do?"

Logically, even with Tang Thirty-Six's temperament, no matter how unbridled he was, even he would not deliberately provoke a

powerful figure like the Tianhai clan head at Clear Lake Restaurant, thus causing the situation to suddenly intensify.

Tang Thirty-Six grew quiet, then said, "We've analyzed before just what the two sides want to do. His Holiness probably wants to quickly hone the sword that is you. Why does the Tianhai clan want to cooperate with him?"

"Because they want to build up momentum...and ultimately force me into a match with Xu Yourong."

"Do you want to engage in a bloody battle with Xu Yourong until the end?"

Chen Changsheng seriously pondered this question. He realized that he had no reason, no justification, for fighting that girl who he had never even met, and so shook his head.

"Then there you are."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "What I want to do right now is to make it impossible for them to imagine just how we will respond. After I finish up with this matter, you can just quietly study and cultivate."

"Is it really okay?" Chen Changsheng looked at him and earnestly asked.

Tang Thirty-Six's straight eyebrows rose as he asked, "Who am

I?"

Chen Changsheng suddenly recalled Su Li by the hot spring in that snowy mountain ridge. He now felt that this matter was rather dubious.

"But why did the other side so abruptly increase their pressure on the Orthodox Academy?"

The dignified head of the Tianhai clan would naturally not alter his established guidelines for the sake of a plate of lobster.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and laughed, seemingly harboring some sort of evil intentions.

"It's plainly obvious that your father-in-law has a rather good impression of you now. The Tianhai clan is quite concerned that Xu Yourong really has taken a fancy to you. If she's not willing to fight you, what then?"

Chen Changsheng was clueless as to how to respond, so he decided to rather awkwardly change the subject. "First, we should resolve the problems before us: how to not be drowned to death by them."

He had said something similar back at Clear Lake Restaurant.

When the Orthodox Academy had originally fallen into a difficult situation, Tang Thirty-Six returned from the Mausoleum of Books.

With a bowl of soy milk in his left hand and a youtiao in his right, he resoundingly and forcefully declared at the gates of the Orthodox Academy that he would solve this problem. And then with great gusto, he plunged the youtiao into the soy milk and declared that he would drown them to death. Now Chen Changsheng was very curious to know—now that the stratagem of 'when the army comes, a general is needed to block it, and when the floods come, the earth drowns it out' was clearly no longer of any use—just how Tang Thirty-Six wanted to continue the drowning.

If there really was no response, then it was better that he not think too much and go straight to the Li Palace to ask the Pope for assistance.

"There are many different ways of drowning." As if he had planned it all in advance, Tang Thirty-Six said, "The strategy I will use next is called '[the drowning of the seven armies](#)'."

(The drowning of the seven armies is a famous tactic from Romance of the Three Kingdoms in which Guan Yu, during the Battle of Fancheng, dammed the Han River and drowned Cao Cao's army. Historically, the flooding of the Han River was a natural occurrence which Guan Yu simply took advantage of.)

"The drowning of the seven armies?" Chen Changsheng was quite perplexed.

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly said, "I heard from before that the Orthodoxy cavalry caught two groups of foreign tourists that were planning to sneak into the Orthodox Academy to see the sights."

Chen Changsheng thought, just what does this have to do with what we're discussing?

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "This matter reminded me of something. Since so many people want to come in and see, we might as well sell tickets. We can even make a little money."

Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po still did not understand.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at them and seriously explained, "What I want to say is, the Orthodox Academy is very big...with just the few of us, won't we feel rather lonely?"

On the morning of the next day, at dawn's first light, many spectators had already arrived outside the Orthodox Academy.

It was obvious that the fact that the Orthodoxy cavalry had arrested three groups of tourists that had attempted to break into the Orthodox Academy had not affected the mood of the rest.

Moreover, news of yesterday's incident at Clear Lake Restaurant as well as the Tianhai clan head's subsequent anger had been spread throughout the capital. Everyone knew that just today alone, more than forty experts had come forth to challenge the Orthodox Academy—it must be known that in the previous few days, there were only several dozen matches in total.

Just who would want to miss this sort of spectacle?

Of course, the Orthodox Academy could do as it had done in the first two days and delay. However, today was different from back then. Today there were forty-some letters of challenge, and there would assuredly be even more on the morrow. Snowflakes continued to fall and snowballs continued to roll along. The mantle of snow upon the ground was only getting thicker and the snowballs were rolled up until they exceeded the gates of the school. Just what could the youths of the Orthodox Academy do?

The flower peddlers outside the lane had already arrived, but the breakfast peddlers had arrived even earlier and taken the good spots. The crowd feasted on piping hot meat buns and refreshing cold noodles while enthusiastically discussing this matter. The air was saturated with the scent of ground meat and cucumber, so much so that those starstruck maidens smitten with Tang Thirty-Six wished that they could stuff the fresh flowers into their bosoms, afraid that their aroma would be ruined.

The crowd gradually grew quiet because, in front of that awning across the street, many people had appeared. Some of them were old, some were young, some tall and some short, but every one of them was silent. It was clear to see that these were not common folk come to see the excitement because their bodies all exuded an extremely dangerous Qi. They were all true experts, all experts that had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy!

Seeing these several dozen experts that the Tianhai clan had taken from the various academies, and even transferred from the counties, many people couldn't help but be concerned for the Orthodox Academy. How can they beat them? How can they even finish?

At this moment, the gate to the Orthodox Academy opened with a creak as someone pushed it open from within.

The street outside the school was absolutely silent, the mood rather strange. Even those young maidens only threw their anxious and expectant gazes over, not incessantly yelling Tang Thirty-Six's name and saying crazy things such as 'I'm definitely going to marry you!' as they had done in the last few days.

The person that came out of the Orthodox Academy was not Tang Thirty-Six, nor was it Chen Changsheng. It was Priest Xin.

Priest Xin swept his gaze through the crowd, especially the group of experts standing in the distance on the street. He couldn't help but shake his head, his expression rather complex. However, it was impossible to tell whether he was concerned about the Orthodox Academy or if it was something else.

He extracted a piece of paper from his bosom and instructed his subordinates to carefully stick it on the wall to the side of the gate. Then he turned the crowd, cleared his throat, and loudly announced, "Today, the Orthodox Academy will temporarily stop receiving applications of challenge."

The Hundred Flowers Lane and the distant street were all silent. This response of the Orthodox Academy's was within the crowd's expectations, but precisely as the crowd had discussed, the Orthodox Academy could not delay forever. Then the Orthodox Academy would inevitably need a new method, and based on logic, this Li Palace priest should have something else to say. This perhaps indicated that something big was about to happen.

Just as expected, Priest Xin followed by announcing, "Today, the Orthodox Academy will formally begin to enroll new students!"

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Chapter 471 - A Farce?

Everything from Hundred Flowers Lane to the main street instantly became silent, and then burst into an uproar!

The crowd was in fervent discussion, the stewards of the Four Great Markets and those important figures under the awning speechlessly shook their heads, and those experts that had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy wrinkled their brows in displeasure. At such a time, the Orthodox Academy suddenly began to enroll new students? Just what did they want to do? The current Orthodox Academy didn't even have a real lecturer or teacher. Just what sort of student did they want to recruit? In addition, quite some time had passed since spring. Those students with decent potential had long since successfully entered the other five Ivy Schools. Even if they wanted to enroll new students, just what sort of students would they be able to get?

No matter what anyone thought, Priest Xin had already said his piece, and the announcement that the Orthodox Academy was admitting students had also already been put up.

The moment the Orthodoxy cavalry dismantled their cordon in front of the Orthodox Academy, the crowd surged forward like the tide to the Orthodox Academy and began to study the enrollment notice on the wall.

"A term of three years, with a final examination for assessment. If one passes, then one is recognized as a student of the Orthodox Academy. If one can't, then get lost?"

"Just who wrote this announcement? How can it be so sloppy?"

"Hey, look here! Students of the Orthodox Academy don't need to pay tuition, and they even get allowance and meals?"

The Orthodox Academy's enrollment notice used red paper and was written in black ink.

Red paper and black characters made for an exceptionally striking combination. It vividly fell on the eyes of every person.

Those simple yet extraordinarily complex provisions, those simple and even somewhat crude rules, immediately astonished the crowd, leaving them mystified as to how to respond.

The stewards of the Four Great Markets made a few copies of the enrollment notice's terms, thus allowing the people under the awning and those experts that had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy to know the specifics of the Orthodox Academy's enrollment.

After reviewing the announcement, the stewards were even more speechless. They could clearly see that this matter was not in accordance with Chen Changsheng's character. This was assuredly the handiwork of that young master of the Tang clan. Consequently, the stewards of the other three markets successively made their way to the Heavenly Fragrance Market's station and questioned it: 'Steward, just what does your market's young master plan on doing? Depend on this to stall for time?' 'Without mentioning anything else, we had a pretty good arrangement

yesterday didn't we?' 'Next match, weren't we going to have Little Principal Chen try and use five moves?'

After reviewing the announcement, the crowd also did not scatter, but rather congregated in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate and conversed. No one knew why the Orthodox Academy had chosen the height of summer, a time not traditionally used for enrollment, to suddenly begin enrolling new students. However, this did not stop each member of the crowd from drawing their own conclusions.

The Orthodox Academy...would probably not enroll any new students.

Without mentioning that the other Ivy Schools had already taken in a round of students in the spring, the sole fact of the Orthodox Academy's current situation foreordained that there would not be many people who would dare to apply.

The present Orthodox Academy was no longer that taboo of the capital it had been before last year, the forgotten cemetery of old. It already had the signs of new life, but how could it deal with this year's tension in the capital? Especially because the Orthodox Academy was precisely the teeth of the storm, where two powerful forces clashed, if one were to enter the Orthodox Academy to study, rather than learning something, they would probably bring upon themselves endless and boundless troubles.

At this time, the Orthodox Academy's gate was once more pushed open. Chen Changsheng and the others carried out several tables, along with brush, ink, and paper.

With a rumble, the crowd surrounded them. The common folk of the capital had always feared nothing, and straight away began asking them the questions on their minds.

Fortunately, the Li Palace priests and Orthodoxy cavalry swiftly arrived on the scene. Without waiting for Chen Changsheng and the rest to grow dizzy from the endless stream of questions, they partitioned off a section.

Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six, and Xuanyuan Po sat themselves behind three separate tables. A stack of paper was arranged on the table, the ink on the ink stone had already been grinded out, and the brushes had been placed on their racks. Chen Changsheng's table also had the register of the Orthodox Academy and the principal's seal.

Everything had been prepared, only applicants were wanted.

It was now fully morning, eight or nine o'clock, and the new sun had already risen.

As time slowly passed, the place in front of the Orthodox Academy's gates still contained just three tables and three people.

The crowd surrounding the announcement had already dispersed, but still no one had come to apply.

Xuanyuan Po's gaze flitted over the delicate brush on its rack and

then glanced at his rough and big hands. He thought to himself, uprooting trees is easy, but writing is too hard...luckily, it seems that no one will be coming today.

Chen Changsheng somewhat awkwardly lowered his head, but since things had already come to this point, he also didn't want to blame Tang Thirty-Six for anything. He just helplessly thought, could it really be that no one will come to apply?

Tang Thirty-Six's table was the most bustling. From time to time, a young maiden would bashfully walk up, place a sachet of perfume on his table, and then sprint away like a startled deer. There were even a few audacious maidens who requested that he write a few words on their fans. Of course, these young maidens only wished to borrow this rare opportunity to get a little closer to him, but not a one truly applied. Priest Xin, who was responsible for maintaining order on the scene, had an unsightly expression on his face, but Tang Thirty-Six seemed unaffected. Yes, he wasn't one bit embarrassed, or at least he didn't show it. He warmly laughed and whispered a few words to those young maidens and then gathered all those presents of perfume on the table. Moreover, he also indicated that he would definitely make good use of these gifts.

After a while, when Tang Thirty Six's table was somewhat less busy, Chen Changsheng availed himself of the opportunity to draw close and whisper, "Which one is Bie Tianxin?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "This sort of personage naturally won't randomly appear on the scene. I've already looked—he's not there."

Chen Changsheng relaxed a little, and then said, "Your table is almost full."

Tang Thirty-Six subtly raised his eyebrows. With an indescribable confidence and pride, he asked, "Envyng this elder brother?"

Chen Changsheng lowered his head and said, "But your table doesn't have a single application form."

Tang Thirty-Six lightly coughed. "There's no need to rush."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Seeing how much you enjoy being surrounded by those girls, I can tell that you really are in no rush."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "What do you know? I'm building up a good image! The Orthodox Academy wants to enroll new students. I am its living signboard. It's only a matter of course that I be patient and warm."

The news that the Orthodox Academy was enrolling new students very quickly spread throughout the entire capital. Many people, including those important personages, couldn't hold back their curiosity. By either coming personally or dispatching competent subordinates, they wished to know just what exactly those youths of the Orthodox Academy were up to.

There were two important personages who, in the past few days,

would often appear in that tea house in Hundred Flowers Lane. Of course, they would not be absent today.

They were precisely Daoist Siyuan, one of those that had suggested the new rule of the All-School Martial Exhibition, and Mao Qiuyu, Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons and representative of the Pope's will.

Daoist Siyuan gazed at the desolate area in front of the Orthodox Academy, at those three tables and those three youths, and shook his head. "Truly a load of nonsense."

Mao Qiuyu sat across from him at the table and watched Tang Thirty-Six wave at the maidens in the crowd. Chortling, he said, "Truly a funny fellow."

Before he was the Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, he was Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy. Before Tang Thirty-Six entered the Orthodox Academy, he was his student.

Daoist Siyuan wrinkled his brow and said, "This sort of farce truly shames the Li Palace."

"A farce? I don't see it that way. Perhaps they won't be able to enroll a single new student today, but..."

Mao Qiuyu's smile vanished as he indifferently declared, "The entire continent will soon know, the Orthodox Academy...after almost twenty years, has finally begun to once more enroll new

students."

The Orthodox Academy beginning to enroll new students once more was speaking of the fact that it was doing so formally and on a large scale. It was completely different from how Chen Changsheng had mistakenly entered the Orthodox Academy.

In the eyes of many of the elders of the conservative faction of the Orthodoxy, as well as the many people of the capital who still remembered the past magnificence of the Orthodox Academy, this was an incredibly significant event.

But at present, from morning until noon, this event really did seem just like a farce.

From beginning to end, the area in front of the Orthodox Academy only contained three tables and three youths. It was so desolate that even the spectators on the side felt rather embarrassed, let alone those involved.

At some point, Tang Thirty-Six had Xuanyuan Po find a big umbrella in the Orthodox Academy's storeroom. It was placed above the three tables, blocking out some of the sunlight and also allowing them to pass a boring period of time.

"Is this okay?" Chen Changsheng lowered his head and asked.

By now, the young maidens that had come to send flowers could no longer bear the intense heat and had reluctantly taken their

leave. The spectators remaining in the lane were looking over as they engaged in spirited discussion. From the expression on their faces, it was evident that they were jeering, although there was no malicious intent.

However, in all of the capital, there might be many people who were ridiculing them, and with a deep malice as well.

Chapter 472 - The Storm Of Enrolling Students (I)

"Of course it's okay."

Tang Thirty-Six's face did not contain even a hint of defeat. "You haven't noticed, although no one has come forward, more and more people are coming to see us."

Xuanyuan Po, in utter suffering from the heat, panted for breath as he said, "The entire capital is coming to laugh at us. What's so good about that?"

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng couldn't help but laugh.

"You really are a stupid black bear." Tang Thirty-Six turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "Carefully examine the crowd. Aren't quite a few of them a bit younger than the usual crowd of spectators? Aren't their eyes a bit livelier?"

Chen Changsheng looked over at the crowd and discovered that it really was the case. Amongst the crowd coming to see the Orthodox Academy today were quite a few young people.

"They didn't come here just to spectate..." Tang Thirty-Six shot a glance at Xuanyuan Po, then continued, "And they didn't come to laugh either. They came to see us."

Chen Changsheng was a little taken aback. "Are you saying that they really are considering whether or not to apply?"

"Not bad." Tang Thirty-Six glanced at the nearby tea house, and then he glanced over at those Tianhai clan experts on the perimeter with their faces of scorn. "Everyone has forgotten one thing. The preparatory examination for next year's Grand Examination is going to be soon, and the Ivy Festival will follow right after. Right now is when the capital is most filled with new students. Successful Purification? Even Meditation Realm wouldn't be asking for too much."

Chen Changsheng recalled last year when he and Luoluo had been around the location of the preparatory examination for the Grand Examination, just how many young scholars they had seen on the streets. He now understood why Tang Thirty-Six had been able to maintain his confidence.

Those young students that had come from the other counties, and even the south, did not have the backing of their schools, unlike the students of the Six Ivies. As a result, their overall level was quite lacking, but that didn't at all mean that their talent was similarly awful. In truth, every year after the Grand Examination's pre-examination and the Ivy Festival, the Six Ivies would take in many students from the counties and provinces. Moreover, these young students assuredly hoped to enter one of the Six Ivies, learn truly profound cultivation methods, follow a renowned teacher, and obtain the backing of a powerful school.

The Orthodox Academy was also one of the Six Ivies. It presumably also possessed a sort of attractive force to these

students from the counties.

"But...why is it that none of them is willing to come forward and apply, or even ask?"

Chen Changsheng asked in confusion as he looked at the young and rather tense face of one of the youths in the crowd.

"Please! Today...no, this entire summer, the Orthodox Academy has been the focus of the entire capital! These pitiful kids from the countryside, how could they have the courage to come forward? They need someone to give them a push."

"Ah...last year when I came to the capital, I was also a youth from the countryside."

"The first thing you did upon coming to the capital was to go to the Divine General of the East's estate to end the engagement. Do you think everyone has skin as thick as yours, and as much nerve as you do?"

It was at this time that Tang Thirty-Six noticed the young people in the crowd begin to show struggle and apprehension in their eyes. Even more assured in his mind, he whispered, "It seems like it's done cooking."

The area covered by the umbrella was not big enough, and so the ink stones on the tables were heated to a scalding temperature. When Xuanyuan Po went to move one, his fingers were burned to a

tender and painful red. Hearing Tang Thirty-Six's words, he thought he was being made fun of. Thinking that this line would soon be followed by some nonsensical line about braised bear palm, Xuanyuan Po clenched his fists and prepared to talk some sense into Tang Thirty-Six. Just then, he was suddenly given a scare.

With a bang, Tang Thirty-Six leaped onto the table.

A gust of wind lifted up the umbrella.

The crowd abruptly grew quiet and all discussion ceased. The crowd looked at the gate of the Orthodox Academy, at Tang Thirty-Six, all thinking to themselves, just what is he up to now? As the sunlight shone upon his body, that gown of his, threaded with gold, was caught up in the breeze. The Wenshui Sword at his waist sparkled with light, but even brighter were the jade ornaments tied to his belt and that gold bracelet on his wrist.

Chen Changsheng looked over and felt like he was about to go blind. He finally understood why Tang Thirty-Six had dressed like this in the morning, and also understood what being a so-called signboard meant!

"I say, everyone here is young, is there any need to be so shy? If you want to, quickly come! Ah, friends, time waits for no one!"

Tang Thirty-Six stood atop the table, looking down at the crowd from up high, calling out to the youths in the crowd with great gusto and enthusiasm.

Chen Changsheng thought this was rather shameless and really wished that he could bore his head into the table. He probably understood now why the Wenshui Tangs were able to become the continent's wealthiest clan.

At first, the crowd was silent, but then it burst into laughter.

After a while, one of the common folk who had come to spectate yelled out from the crowd, "Hey, big guy! Why would someone want to apply for your Orthodox Academy?"

Not only was Tang Thirty-Six not upset, he was actually elated. I forgot yesterday to have the Heavenly Fragrance Market place a few professional plants in the crowd, but who would have thought that such a question would appear on its own! With a clear voice, he said, "Although the preparatory examination for the Grand Examination has been delayed, it's already just around the corner. There's only a few more days left, or are you saying that none of you want to advance by leaps and bounds, that none of you want to display your splendor at the Ivy Festival?"

A suntanned youth, possibly from some private school in the countryside, gathered up his courage and said, "There's a high chance that we can enter some other school."

What he said was true. Besides the famed Six Ivies, the capital was home to countless other schools.

Tang Thirty-Six turned to the young student from the

countryside and said scornfully, "Just what school are you comparing to my Orthodox Academy?"

At these words, no matter if they had come to spectate or if they had come to laugh, everyone nodded their heads and thought, no matter how much the Orthodox Academy has declined, since it's reopened its doors, it's already incomparable to normal schools. Soon after, someone asked, "Then why can't we just enter the other five academies?"

"The Ivy Academies customarily only take in students after the conclusion of the preparatory examination. Only...everybody pay attention now...only our Orthodox Academy will enroll new students before the preparatory examination."

Tang Thirty-Six had extracted a folding fan from somewhere. While fanning himself, he said, "If you guys can't even pass the preparatory examination, which school is going to take you? When all's said and done, applying for our Orthodox Academy is the safest."

"We don't want safety," a rather gloomy-looking young scholar piped up. "Since we've already traveled a thousand li to get here, we've naturally made preparations to crash through the gates with a magnificent army. We would prefer to wait for the conclusion of the preparatory examination, and then apply to other schools."

It was obvious that this young scholar was extremely confident in his cultivation and education.

Tang Thirty-Six turned to that youth and asked, "How old are you this year?"

The young scholar replied, "This year, I am twenty and four months."

"Then you're still young, so why don't you have any of the edge of youth?"

Tang Thirty-Six perked his eyebrows as he looked the young scholar, seeming to view him with a little contempt.

The young scholar wanted to say a few words in refutation, but Tang Thirty-Six didn't give him the chance. Turning back to the crowd, he declared, "Just why must you all enter the Heavenly Dao Academy? Because His Holiness came from the Heavenly Dao Academy? Why must you get into the Temple Seminary or the Li Palace Academy? Because His Holiness's elderly self is somewhat closer by? Why must you get into the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green? Because of all the pretty senior sisters within?"

These words elicited roars of laughter from the crowd.

"If you guys insist on entering Star Seizer Academy, I have no objections, only well-wishes and respect. But if you originally wanted to enter those schools..." Tang Thirty-Six folded his fan and slapped it against his palm, proudly declaring to the crowd, "Then why don't you choose my Orthodox Academy? Ladies and gentlemen, we are all youths, fresh and clean, bright and cheerful! We don't follow the conventional pattern, don't walk the common

path! My Orthodox Academy has many things that need to be done. A white sheet of paper is incomparably clean. For what reason do you not wish to take part in this grand undertaking? Moreover, how can those schools measure up to my Orthodox Academy?"

That young scholar felt like that fan had struck him in the heart. He inadvertently became much more serious and completely absorbed every word, and even felt this argument rather reasonable.

Those students that had come from the counties, the countryside, and even the distant south, had truthfully only heard rumors of the academies of the capital and weren't clear at all on the differences between them. As a result, they didn't think any part of Tang Thirty-Six's talk especially stood out. However, to the Tianhai clan experts in front of the awning and the many officials in their carriages, this talk was particularly grating on the ear.

The Heavenly Dao Academy, the Temple Seminary, the Li Palace Academy, the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green...all of them were inferior to the Orthodox Academy? It must be known that these several dozen experts that were prepared to challenge the Orthodox Academy today were basically all from these four schools. Even the as-of-yet missing Bie Tianxin, although his family was extraordinary, had always considered himself a disciple of the Li Palace Academy.

In the tea house, Mao Qiuyu and Daoist Siyuan also could not help but wrinkle their foreheads. Daoist Siyuan had also come from the Li Palace Academy. As for Mao Qiuyu, he had first been a

student at the Heavenly Dao Academy, and then a teacher, all the way until he became its principal, spanning a period of several centuries. It was impossible for them to accept Tang Thirty-Six's words.

As expected, a furious question arose from the crowd, "And just what basis do you have to say this?"

Tang Thirty-Six didn't even look at the questioner, continuing, "His Holiness truly did come from the Heavenly Dao Academy. The Li Palace Academy and the Temple Seminary truly are within the Li Palace. But you all have to get one thing straight, the Principal of our Orthodox Academy is called Chen Changsheng...you guys can study your entire lives in the Li Palace Academy and the Temple Seminary and never meet His Holiness, but if you enter the Orthodox Academy?"

Here, he paused. He began to laugh and it seemed like there was some profound meaning in this laugh.

Everyone knew what attitude the Pope had to Chen Changsheng.

Many young students glanced at each other and there were whispered discussions. It seemed that they were gradually coming around to the idea.

"Let us say it even more directly...everyone, look! This mountainous little friend of mine is Xuanyuan Po, an ordinary demi-human youth of the bear tribe."

Tang Thirty-Six used the folding fan to point at Xuanyuan Po, saying, "In terms of talent, he has none. In terms of achievement, he has none. In terms of background, he has none. You can even say that if you want it, he doesn't have it. Even he's very ashamed of it, so much so that he voluntarily dropped out of Star Seizer Academy and then...was picked from the night market by Chen Changsheng and Princess Luoluo! The result?"

The crowd grew quiet.

He was very satisfied with this outcome, continuing, "The result? He entered the Orthodox Academy. Without even recovering from his injury, without even participating in the Grand Examination, the Pavilion of Divination ranked him in the Proclamation of Azure Sky!"

These words made those students from the counties turn pensive. Seeing Xuanyuan Po behind the table, they became even more willing.

This matter was known to many, and it truly was very persuasive. Perhaps the Orthodox Academy really was a place where touching a stone could turn it into gold?

Chapter 473 - The Storm Of Enrolling Students (II)

Tang Thirty-Six truly deserved to be the successor of the Wenshui Tangs. His words really did possess a seductive strength. The area in front of the Orthodox Academy grew much quieter and many people began to seriously consider the specific terms on the enrollment notice.

The sole person dissatisfied was naturally Xuanyuan Po. He was extremely unhappy as he listened. What 'in terms of talent, I don't have any, if you want something, I won't have it'? And ashamed? I'm ashamed your uncle! However, he was clearly aware of the reason Tang Thirty-Six had used him as an example, so there was nothing he could do. He could only forcefully bear it, even if his breathing became much rougher. He even, under the direction of Tang Thirty-Six, was compelled to stand up, raise his thick right arm, and squeeze out an honest smile as he waved at the crowd.

There was applause from the crowd.

Tang Thirty-Six was thoroughly satisfied at the results of his advertising. Encouraging them even more, he said, "Just now, I mentioned Princess Luoluo..."

His voice suddenly soared, "That's right! If you guys enter the Orthodox Academy, the inheritor of the eight hundred li of the Red River, the esteemed maiden of the demi-human realm, the precious treasure of two Saints, the White Emperor's Her Highness Princess Luoluo, will be your schoolmate!

"Also, His Holiness's designated successor, the youngest Principal of the Orthodox Academy in history, Chen Changsheng, will passionately coach you all!"

Upon saying this, he indicated that Chen Changsheng should stand and wave to the crowd.

Chen Changsheng felt extremely ashamed. He turned his head to the academy's wall and seriously examined the enrollment announcement, acting like the red paper and black characters contained the secret to defying the heavens and changing fate.

Tang Thirty-Six didn't care that much. He looked at the crowd and continued, "By now, all of you should know that in the entire capital, no, the entire human world, including Scholartree Manor, Mount Li, and all those other schools I discussed, there is not one that has a deeper background or a more powerful backing than my Orthodox Academy! And most importantly, if you guys successfully enter the Orthodox Academy, you'll also have one more extremely exceptional schoolmate."

That one enthusiastic person who had started it all asked another question at just the right time: "Who?"

Tang Thirty-Six's eyes seemed to glow as he thought to himself, afterwards, I have to tell the steward of the Heavenly Fragrance Market to find this person and bestow upon them a few small riches.

His eyes began to glow and, under the blazing sunlight, his entire body seemed to glow as well. The Wenshui Sword, the golden bracelet, and the jade ornaments all sparkled and gleamed in front of the crowd.

After three hearty laughs, he said, "It's rather embarrassing, but it's me."

"Perhaps some of my young friends have come from afar and aren't too clear on who I am. Permit me to introduce myself to you all. I am called Tang Thirty-Six."

Here, he glanced at Chen Changsheng, then continued, "I'm not the thirty-sixth child of my family, but rather when I was fifteen and first entered the Proclamation of Azure Sky, I was ranked thirty-sixth."

Hearing this, those kids from the countryside that really didn't know who he was couldn't help but gasp in shock, thinking, to be able to enter the Proclamation of Azure Sky at fifteen, the Orthodox Academy truly does have crouching tigers and hidden dragons.

"Everyone, don't be too surprised! Please take a look behind me again." Tang Thirty-Six pointed at Chen Changsheng and said, "Our Principal Chen is still three months from turning sixteen. To be more precise, when he was fifteen, he was already at the upper level of Ethereal Opening. He's never been on the Proclamation of Azure Sky because when he became qualified to enter the Proclamation of Azure Sky, the Proclamation of Azure Sky was no longer qualified to accept him."

Chen Changsheng was already famous throughout the continent, his story spreading to the most remote of the counties and provinces. But upon hearing this introduction, the young students in the crowd were still absolutely stunned. The eyes they shifted to the Orthodox Academy's enrollment announcement seemed ablaze, and a few of those burning gazes even fell directly on Chen Changsheng's body.

There was nothing more Chen Changsheng could do. He helplessly stood up, clasping his hands at the crowd and provoking warm accolades.

"Speaking of the Azure Sky, when I began talking about it, I realized that I wasn't done. Right now in the Orthodox Academy there lies one more future classmate of you ladies and gentlemen."

Tang Thirty-Six loudly proclaimed, "He's called Wofu Zhexiu."

With these words, the crowd burst once more into an uproar.

Chen Changsheng's fame was a matter of this year, but the legendary story of the wolf youth resisting the demons alone in the snowy plains was a story that had been circulating in the human world for quite a few years.

Back when Xu Yourong was on the Proclamation of Azure Sky, Zhexiu had always been right below her. But every single young man and woman that had resolved themselves to a life study, that had devoted themselves to the Dao, knew of the reason behind his

name.

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "Speaking still of the Proclamation of Azure Sky, the only one back then that could defeat Lord Zhexiu was Xu Yourong, but all of you should also know that Xu Yourong is our Little Principal Chen's..."

Chen Changsheng could no longer bear it and glared at him.

Tang Thirty-Six realized that he had gotten a little carried away and hurriedly made to skip this part. "Today's sun is a bit much, I forgot where I had spoken up to. Wasn't I speaking about myself?"

This evoked a wave of boos from the crowd, as well as the angry complaints of one young maiden to the crowd.

Tang Thirty-Six gathered his thoughts, then calmly and seriously explained, "The reason, ladies and gentlemen, that I said that if you were to enter the Orthodox Academy, I would be your most important schoolmate, or to put it another way, why does the Orthodox Academy have me? It's not because of how strong I am. If we're talking about strength or cultivation, I'm definitely not up to par with freaks like Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu, but...I come from the Wenshui Tang clan. Ladies and gentlemen, on your path to knowledge, I can be your strongest supporter."

He pointed at the enrollment announcement by the gate. "For instance, we're not taking tuition and even giving an allowance. Of course, that's only for this year. That won't be the case later on."

A young student creased his brow and asked, "Not taking money and even giving it away, aren't you guys just buying students?"

"I'm not buying, I'm bribing." Tang Thirty-Six's expression was still calm, smiling as he said, "If you've succeeded with ordinary Purification, your room and board will be covered and you'll get a monthly allowance of five silver taels. If you're at the initial level of Meditation, you'll get fifty silver taels a month. For each successive breakthrough, the monthly allowance will double. If you successfully break into Ethereal Opening, then besides the monthly silver, you'll also get ten crystals to help you cultivate."

The enrollment announcement had only stated that there would be an allowance and that tuition was free, but it had not given specific numbers. Upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six describe the details, the crowd instantly became silent as a grave. Even those Tianhai clan experts in the distance were rather shocked. As for the stewards of the other three markets, they turned to the steward of the Heavenly Fragrance Market with an indescribable amazement on their faces. Your clan's young master is such a spendthrift—does anybody back at Wenshui know of this?

Tang Thirty-Six was very satisfied with the crowd's response. "As for the question of food, none of you need be concerned. Clear Lake Restaurant...is now the Orthodox Academy's cafeteria."

Those young students who had come from the counties were okay upon hearing this, but the common folk of the capital, especially the gluttons amongst them, almost fell unconscious.

Clear Lake Restaurant was the capital's most renowned and most

expensive restaurant. Was it...was it really going to close down? Was it really going to become the Orthodox Academy's cafeteria?

Xuanyuan Po was abundantly satisfied and decided to pardon Tang Thirty-Six for his actions today.

But the gazes that many people shot at Tang Thirty-Six made it seem like they had just laid eyes on their nemesis who had killed their father.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at them in confusion. "What's wrong?"

One person couldn't help but say, "Sir, this is a bit too much of an exaggeration. Is there anyone that runs a school in this way?"

Tang Thirty-Six seriously replied, "I'm richer than most, could it be that all of you still haven't realized this fact?"

Chapter 474 - The Storm Of Enrolling Students (III)

Without question, if everything Tang Thirty-Six said here became fact, then the Orthodox Academy would be the school with the best conditions in all of history. However, it was still a school in the end, so what was most importantly was inevitably not a cafeteria or allowance, but what could be learned within the school. There might have been some that didn't care, but there were even more students that did.

"I hear that the Orthodox Academy doesn't even have a lecturer. If we were to enter, what would we learn?"

It was that young student with the extreme self-confidence who earnestly asked this question.

"This person here is Priest Xin of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education. In the tea house, that one over there, the Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons Mao Qiuyu is drinking tea right now." Tang Thirty-Six looked at the young student and said, "You should have already seen, our Orthodox Academy is guarded by the Orthodoxy cavalry, its order is kept by the priests of the Li Palace. If you require instruction, do you think it will be difficult?"

"But...in the end, it's been a very long time since the priests of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education taught classes. Moreover, I really am concerned over just what cultivation methods we can learn in the Orthodox Academy. After all, it's been many years since classes were last taught here." The young student earnestly pursued his questions.

"Stupid." Tang Thirty-Six shook his head. "Chen Changsheng knows the Daoist Canon from back to front and is astonishingly well-read. The long-established Orthodox Academy has deep stores of knowledge. Just what cultivation method do you want that it doesn't have?"

Saying this, he refused to give any more explanation. Turning back to the crowd, he declared, "The Orthodox Academy is only enrolling students for a single day. Don't miss out on this opportunity."

The student saw that he was being ignored, but this only served to harden his resolve. He was the first to walk up to the table and declare, "I want to apply."

As in many matters of the world, as long as one person took the lead, those who followed would appear one after the other. With but a few moments of labor, those numerous students who were standing amongst the crowd a few moments ago had all come to the tables. Because they were concerned that there was a limit to the number of applicants, they even began to fight with each other. There were endless cries in the vein of, "I want to apply, I was third in line!"

"I also want to apply! I am second-ranked in Jiangnan County. I've already succeeded in entering Meditation."

"Principal Chen, I'm willing to pay tuition, and I don't need an allowance either. I just want you to accept me."

In order to attend the Grand Examination's preparatory examination and even more importantly to catch the attention of the Ivy Schools at the Ivy Festival, the innumerable young students of the counties of the Great Zhou and the south were currently congregated in the capital. Now they surrounded the Orthodox Academy as an impenetrable crowd, turning the scene into a cacophony of noise.

Chen Changsheng took the filled-out forms and, after looking them over, handed them to Priest Xin and the rest to record. However, he did not write their names onto the register. After all, it was only natural that entering the Orthodox Academy also required a test, or else if some evildoer mixed himself in, it would certainly cause quite the ruckus in the future.

With the assistance of Priest Xin and the other priests of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, the enrollment of new students for the Orthodox Academy proceeded very smoothly. The stack of application forms continued to grow thicker and higher. Xuanyuan Po incessantly massaged his hands while Tang Thirty-Six chuckled as he called out to every applicant and even took on the duty of answering their questions. Every question he answered or confusion he cleared was done extremely well.

Chen Changsheng couldn't help but shake his head at the scene. Just what was so attractive about this matter that would cause this habitually lazy guy to put so much heart into it?

Suddenly, a scornful voice rang out from the street, "The way you talk about it is even more pleasant than singing. What deep

background? What numerous cultivation methods? When all is said and done...isn't it still that just the few of you can't deal with all the challenges from the Ivy Schools and so are temporarily taking in new students to serve as scapegoats?"

These words cast the area in front of the Orthodox Academy into an abnormal silence. The faces of these young students seemed to subtly change as they silently looked at each other. They realized that these words were extremely sensible, or else why was it that rather than earlier or later, the Orthodox Academy would just so happen to take on new students at this time?

The crowd gradually parted, revealing the man who had spoken.

Tang Thirty-Six slowly narrowed his eyes, the expression in them turning sharp.

That person should still have been quite young, but his demeanor and way of dressing was that of an old man. He wore blue clothes that had been washed so many times that the color had faded to white and his feet sported a pair of cloth shoes. His eyes, however, were extremely deep, seeming like they could see into the hearts of all. At the corner of his lips danced a nigh-imperceptible tinge of ridicule.

He looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said, "Could it be that I've seen through your petty calculations and you now feel thoroughly embarrassed?"

Tang Thirty-Six did not respond to this question, rather staring

back and asking, "Bie Tianxin?"

At this name, Chen Changsheng stood up and Xuanyuan Po clenched his fists.

"Correct, I am Bie Tianxin."

Upon seeing their response, that person perked his eyebrows, seeming to be filled with contempt. "Who I am is not at all important. Whether my words are accurate or not, that is what is important."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Why can you decide whether what you say is correct?"

"You are Chen Changsheng?"

That person very seriously examined him, then shook his head as if he was somewhat disappointed. "I had originally thought that you were really as extraordinary as Qiushan Jun, but now I see that you can't compare."

After barely a pause, Chen Changsheng replied, "Please advise."

"Since you know that I'm [Bie Tianxin](#), you know that my name comes from the saying, 'distinguish the will of the heavens, completely calculate the hearts of men'."

(Tianxin 天心 means 'will of the heavens', Bie 别 means 'to

separate/distinguish')

With a hint of scorn, that person continued, "These petty tricks can deceive these children from the countryside, but how could it deceive me?"

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng raised his head and replied, "This way isn't right."

Bie Tianxin raised his eyebrow and asked with a false smile, "Your right and wrong?"

"Yesterday, I said something to Tang Thirty-Six: without solid evidence, don't criticize."

Chen Changsheng looked at him and said, "In Xunyang City, I also said to Su Li, don't imagine the world to be too dark, because that only means that you yourself are too in the dark!"

These two statements caused Bie Tianxin's eyebrows to gradually descend. This was obviously not because he approved of Chen Changsheng's words, nor did he care much about that first statement which mentioned Tang Thirty-Six. The second statement, however, had mentioned Su Li, which forced him to be somewhat more cautious.

"But, you really are doing it in this way."

The corners of his lips once more revealed a scornful smile.

Seeming rather detestable, he looked at Tang Thirty-Six and said, "Could it be that in the future, the Orthodox Academy won't let these students participate in matches?"

The young students were all exceptionally tense. If what this person said was true, then entering the Orthodox Academy was actually an extreme risk! How could they be any match for such opponents? If they died in such a shady manner, how could they live up to the ardent hopes of their parents back home? What Grand Examination? Wouldn't all this turn into illusions?

Countless gazes rested on Tang Thirty-Six, wanting to know just what he had to say.

Tang Thirty-Six was quiet for a very long time before he finally made his response.

"Upon applying to the Orthodox Academy, if they pass the assessment, they would become students of the Orthodox Academy. Since they're students of the Orthodox Academy, it's only a matter of course that they represent the Orthodox Academy in matches!"

With these words, the entire area fell into turmoil.

Chapter 475 - The Storm Of Enrolling Students (IV)

Bie Tianxin was rather surprised. He hadn't imagined Tang Thirty-Six would admit the matter straight away. He mocked, "Although your way of doing things is extremely unpleasant, you're actually quite open about it."

Then he turned to the students with a smirk and declared, "All of you heard it."

The young students instantly fell into a panic. Some students who were preparing to apply but hadn't yet filled out the forms took advantage of the moment when no one was looking to move towards the edge of the crowd. Those students who had already handed over their forms suddenly paled and became filled with regret. One student rather nervously looked at Chen Changsheng and stuttered, "Sir...you see Sir...the form that I just filled out...can I take it back?"

"Of course you can take it back," Tang Thirty-Six heard that youth's voice and replied without looking back. With his eye still fixed on Bie Tianxin, he warned, "However, the people who withdraw now will never again have the opportunity to enter the Orthodox Academy."

And then the tips of his brows leapt upwards as he laughed, saying, "And to every student of the Orthodox Academy, I swear on His Holiness's character that they will not be disturbed in the slightest when confronting the challenges of the schools."

Upon hearing those words, the hands of those students reaching to take back their forms paused on the table. The Orthodox Academy would actually swear an oath on His Holiness's name? And this person appears so relaxed, could it be that it's not as bad as that person said?

Bie Tianxin sneered, "Blades and swords have no eyes, so how can you guarantee this? Or are you planning on playing another of your petty little tricks?"

Tang Thirty-Six mockingly replied, "To a person as lacking in wisdom as you, it's naturally easy to mistake everything that you see for a petty trick."

If Tang Thirty-Six really had been planning on playing a petty trick, then when Bie Tianxin had declared to the crowd that the Orthodox Academy's enrollment concealed evil intentions, it was completely possible for him to resolutely and decisively deny it. As for what would happen after he had tricked these students into entering the Orthodox Academy, it was completely possible for him to discuss it when the time came. But he did not. Instead, he admitted that the new students admitted into the Orthodox Academy would represent the Orthodox Academy in the All-School Martial Exhibition as was right and proper.

When confronting these condemning and difficult-to-explain attacks, to be open was often the most powerful weapon. This was a part of the great wisdom of a nobleman.

The facts were proof that many people were willing to accept this open-mindedness. Some students, after thinking it through a few times, still took back their application forms from Chen Changsheng. However, many students believed in Tang Thirty-Six's promise, or perhaps they did not dare to doubt the Pope's character. Although some of them were uneasy, they still continued the application process until its completion. Soon after, more youths began to come up and place themselves in the line to apply to the Orthodox Academy.

Seeing that his words had not achieved too much, Bie Tianxin put on an ugly face. Turning to Chen Changsheng, he said with disdain, "In the future, if they are not cheated, then they should be giving thanks to me for what I said just now. And now that I think of it, you lot should be quite angry right now, seeing that your sinister motives were exposed by me. In the future, if you plan to use these students again, I'm afraid that I'll have to bring you more trouble."

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six looked into each other's eyes, both of them truly furious now.

The Orthodox Academy's enrollment of new students was naturally related to the pressure placed upon it by the Tianhai clan, but they had absolutely never harbored any intention of using these students from the counties and the countryside.

They had clearly not harbored such evil intentions, but this hat had been placed on them against their will; this was a condemnation.

And this sort of thing never required facts. It only required a few words to plant suspicion in the minds of other. It was the most difficult to refute and also the easiest to be angered by.

"I know that you must be very angry now, but...you can only bear with it, because none of you is my opponent. Even that wolf cub lying within the Orthodox Academy also lost to me in the past." Bie Tianxin looked at Chen Changsheng with an indifferent expression, asking, "And you? When are you prepared to lose to me?"

"Truly worthy of being Bie Tianxin who can completely calculate the minds of men."

Tang Thirty-Six walked in front of Chen Changsheng and asked Bie Tianxin, "I really want to know if you can calculate just what I plan to do next?"

Bie Tianxin perked his eyebrows. His curiosity piqued, he ventured, "You want to fight me in a match?"

"I can't beat you," Tang Thirty-Six very honestly admitted.

Bie Tianxin was in a very pleasant mood. Chuckling, he said, "Then I assume that you can only taunt me with a few sentences, saying a few sour words to me."

Tang Thirty-Six shook his head. "I've never done that sort of thing."

Bie Tianxin's brows rose even higher. He really was very curious, wanting to know just what sort of response this youth could come up with in this sort of situation.

Tang Thirty-Six got up close and gave him a serious look as he said "."

His voice was very soft and the surroundings were quite noisy, so besides him and Chen Changsheng, only Bie Tianxin could hear it clearly.

Bie Tianxin thought he had not heard it clearly. His eyebrows reached even higher as he asked in confusion, "What did you say?"

"I said....."

This time, his voice was a little louder, so there were even more people who heard those four words.

The noise and discussion instantly ceased. As the area around the Orthodox Academy fell into complete silence, all eyes were fixed on Tang Thirty-Six.

Especially those stewards and the experts of the Tianhai clan. They knew of Bie Tianxin's identity and origins, so the gazes they shot at Tang Thirty-Six were even more shocked to the extreme.

Bie Tianxin's face was extraordinarily unsightly and his eyes flashed with brutality, almost like he wanted to devour the person before him.

Tang Thirty-Six stared at him and seriously asked, "Aren't you the one who completely calculates the hearts of men? Then did you or did you not calculate what I would say to you?"

Bie Tianxin narrowed his eyes and a killing aura gradually began to emanate from his body. The voice that oozed out from the gaps between his teeth was incomparably cold. "Say it again?"

"Are your ears no good?" Tang Thirty-Six seemed rather surprised, then said, "Then you have to listen clearly this time: F**k. Your. Mother. C**t."

The area in front of the Orthodox Academy was dead silent.

Bie Tianxin was wrathful, but he smiled, the derision at the corner of his lips having been completely transformed into ice. "So it turns out that you were looking to die."

Chen Changsheng walked in front of Tang Thirty-Six, blocking Bie Tianxin's gaze.

He did not like Tang Thirty-Six's foul words, but when he thought of those loathsome and condemning words uttered by this person, he was forced to admit that only Tang Thirty-Six's type of response was useful. This was what was meant by the saying,

'Tactics are useless before absolute strength, foul words defeat wisdom'. Moreover, Tang Thirty-Six was putting himself out there for both him and the Orthodox Academy. So no matter how inappropriate the words were, even if they were incorrect or would bring great troubles to the Orthodox Academy, he still had to stand together with Tang Thirty-Six. It was just that he could never have said such foul words, and only calmly declared, "His words also express my position."

Then it was also the Orthodox Academy's position.

Bie Tianxin cooled down, which actually made him even more dangerous. It seemed like a frigid sword intent was about to break through his clothes.

Chen Changsheng felt like he was seeing Guan Bai on the street again, sword intent flashing across the eyes and a threatening sharpness about the person.

"So it turns out that the both of you were looking to die."

"I don't want to die," Chen Changsheng declared, "but if you had not provoked us, the situation would not have gotten so ugly."

Bie Tianxin turned to Tang Thirty-Six, a smirk on his face, asking, "When you said those four words, could it be that you never inquired about who my mother was?"

If it was an ordinary person who had not known of Bie Tianxin's

origins, they would assuredly inquire on his background after hearing these words. If they did know of his origins, who would dare say foul words referring to his parents?

However, Tang Thirty-Six had never been an ordinary person. He mockingly asked, "The Storms of the Eight Directions are important?"

Chapter 476 - The Storm Of Enrolling Students (V)

Bie Tianxin continued to narrow his eyes, his gaze growing sharper. He had not imagined that his opponent, even knowing his origins, would still act so brazenly.

He had originally come to the capital to take care of some matters, but he had unexpectedly found that one of his elders had encountered some trouble. In addition, he had heard the names of the Orthodox Academy and Chen Changsheng many times over the past year. He viewed them with disdain and was naturally not convinced, so he made a personal appearance. Guan Bai had given Chen Changsheng one year of time, but he did not have that sort of patience. As for the fact that this was the strong bullying the weak, he also did not care. It must be known that he lived his whole life carried along by the wind and currents. His talent was outstanding, his background astonishing, and no matter where he walked, he received the reverence of all. Once when his travels had taken him through Xunyang City, even Liang Wangsun had treated him with utmost respect. Even though Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, that madman, had no love for him, his family background had prevented him from being truly troubled. He could never have imagined that today of all days, he would encounter this opponent who defied common sense.

"I know that you must be very angry right now, but...you can only bear with it. What can you do? Could it be that you can kill us? I just don't understand, for what reason are you worthy to act so high and mighty before us? How old is Zhexiu? How old are you? How old were you a few years ago? What's there to be so satisfied about beating him? Think about when you were his age;

would you have been able to beat any of us?"

The first part of these words were precisely what Bie Tianxin had said to them a moment ago. Tang Thirty-Six was now returning his words.

"Are the Storms of the Eight Directions so arrogant? In other places, perhaps you could rely on them to arrogantly order others around, but I must trouble you to open your eyes a little and take a look at where you are."

He pointed behind at the gate of the Orthodox Academy, still new despite having been put up a year ago, and sneered, "Here is the Orthodox Academy, here is the Wenshui Tang clan, here is Su Li, here is the Orthodoxy, here is three Saints! I've never been much of one to bring up things like background and supporters because I think that's far too childish, too shameless. But there's always people like you popping up who just love to bring these sorts of things up. The problem is, if we do bring these things up, do you even have a chance of beating us in that aspect?"

Bie Tianxin's complexion became deathly pale at these words because it was only now that he abruptly realized that everything Tang Thirty-Six had said was true. When that senior of his wanted to suppress the Orthodox Academy, they had done so step by step, advancing cautiously and prudently. He...seemed to have acted a little too impulsively.

But in the end, he was still a member of the Proclamation of Liberation, still a descendant of two of the Eight Storms. Tang Thirty-Six's word had left him without a gracious path of retreat,

so how could he just leave like this!

His face was pale, both because he had understood and also because he knew that he had to take action, or else both his and his family's reputation might soon suffer a heavy blow!

At some point, his right hand had come to clench the hilt of his sword.

Chen Changsheng stood in front of Tang Thirty-Six, his right hand almost touching the Stainless Sword. He stared into Bie Tianxin's eyes, extremely calm and focused, without the slightest intention of backing down.

Xuanyuan Po had already finished his preparations for battle. When he saw the extremely vicious expression in Bie Tianxin's eyes, his normally simple and honest air was replaced with the berserk aura that foreshadowed metamorphosis.

They all knew, if Bie Tianxin were to attack, then he would be the strongest person the Orthodox Academy had ever confronted since the opening of the All-School Martial Exhibition.

Moreover, if Bie Tianxin truly were to attack with murderous intent, no one could foresee how this situation would end.

A deathly stillness hung over the area in front of the Orthodox Academy. The crowd had long since dispersed, and the atmosphere was particularly tense.

Tang Thirty-Six, on the contrary, wasn't nervous at all. Peeking out from behind Chen Changsheng's back, he said to Bie Tianxin, "Think it over clearly, if you randomly act out, just what the consequences will be."

Then he turned to the Li Palace priests and Orthodoxy cavalry and yelled, "Just what are you standing around for? Do you not see that your future Pope is about to be killed before your eyes!?"

These words were naturally yelled out for Bie Tianxin to hear.

By a table in that tea house, those two individuals were still seated.

"Ah, truly childish." Mao Qiuyu gazed at the distant activity occurring in front of the Orthodox Academy, but it was up in the air whether he was talking about Tang Thirty-Six or Bie Tianxin.

He was keenly aware that Bie Tianxin's parents had extremely good relations with Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang, similar to the relationship Zhu Luo and Guan Xingke had with the late Archbishop Mei Lisha. He was also keenly aware that though Bie Tianxin was praised by the common people as being able to calculate the hearts of men, he was ultimately just a noble son spoiled by his parents. Or else how could he have not realized before he appeared on the scene that these youths of the Orthodox Academy were not people he could offend?

"Ah, just take him away," Mao Qiuyu said to Daoist Siyuan across

from him. "His parents originally placed him in your care. You can't just let him get into trouble in front of you."

Daoist Siyuan's face was rather unsightly, but he remained silent. Standing up, he walked out of the tea house.

Mao Qiuyu turned once more to the Orthodox Academy, commenting, "After so many years, his temper hasn't changed one bit. No wonder he's never been able to match up to Guan Bai."

Bie Tianxin departed.

The Orthodox Academy obtained victory in this struggle.

In the view of many, this struggle was exceptionally childish and ridiculous, more mischievous than the mischief of children. However, to those who knew of Bie Tianxin's true identity, this childish and ridiculous struggle was an indication of many things.

The Orthodox Academy had once more proved to the capital its powerful backing and hidden strength, and that its power was fully mature. Yes, even if the power of White Emperor City represented by Princess Luoluo was set aside, with the attention of the Pope and the relationship between Chen Changsheng and Su Li, outside of a proper method like the All-School Martial Exhibition, would there be anyone that dared to suppress the Orthodox Academy through nonlegal means?

Those students who came from the provinces and counties did

not know Bie Tianxin's identity at the very beginning. Upon learning of it, they couldn't help but admire Tang Thirty-Six's unyielding attitude, so much so that they almost wanted to grovel on the ground before his feet. They also had a completely new impression of the Orthodox Academy. As a result, the work of processing applications, which had momentarily slowed, became all the more intense. Those young students that had withdrawn their application attempted to take advantage of moments of inattentiveness to re-apply again, but how could they conceal themselves from Tang Thirty-Six's eyes? He drove them away without the slightest courtesy.

Chen Changsheng commented, "Too severe."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "I've never been one to rub sand into my eyes. I'm not even willing to tolerate Bie Tianxin, so why should I tolerate these guys?"

Chen Changsheng was very curious about this friend of his, inquiring, "Have you been like this since you were small?"

Tang Thirty-Six responded very matter-of-factly, "If the only thing behind me was the Wenshui Tang clan and I had to face these two Storms, I would naturally have to consider it. I might have even been the first to concede, but don't I have you now?"

Chen Changsheng was made speechless by this matter-of-factness. After a long period of silence, he said, "As I said before, rudeness and cursing is bad. You must restrain it a little."

Tang Thirty-Six arched his brows. "What's bad about it? Isn't being straightforward good?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Getting angry injures the liver, and in addition, it's not good for children to hear such profanity. Quite a few people have already come to complain."

Chapter 477 - Sword Techniques Originate From The Mouth (I)

The Orthodox Academy began its one day of enrolling new students and it only accepted applicants for one day. In the end, more than six hundred people applied.

With the Orthodoxy cavalry patrolling and guarding all sides, the Li Palace priests maintaining order, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education personally drawing up the questions, and Priest Xin overseeing it all, both the application period and the exam on the next day went extremely smoothly.

Besides the grades from the examination, those who wanted to become new students of the Orthodox Academy had to pass through two more steps. The first was an investigation of identity, with the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education primarily responsible for this task. With the involvement of the Li Palace, investigating the details of these examinees was exceptionally simple. In the end, six examinees were eliminated in this phase. The second step was an interview, with Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six personally carrying it out. As for Xuanyuan Po, he had no interest whatsoever. It could even be said that he was so attached to the head chef of Clear Lake Restaurant that it was nigh-impossible to pull him away.

The contents of the interview were extremely simple. It was just a greeting and then a random chat. Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six's passing standards were also very simple. They just looked at the way the examinees spoke. Of course, what was most important was whether they liked the look of them or not. As he

looked at the figures of those examinees who had been eliminated at the interview phase walk away while hiding their faces, Chen Changsheng thought of how, last year, he had also been one of these examinees. Upon thinking of how he had applied to school after school but had his efforts sabotaged by the Divine General of the East's estate, he couldn't help but sigh at how quickly the situation had changed. He had actually turned from an examinee to the examiner, and he felt it rather unbearable.

A hundred examinees passed these three assessments, and these became the new students the Orthodox Academy accepted this year. Rather surprisingly, the level of these new students was actually relatively good. Even though they originated from the more remote counties and provinces, they had all actually successfully undergone Purification. There were even forty-odd students that had successfully entered the initial level of Meditation. Chen Changsheng even felt that there were a few students with decent talent in cultivation. What was most shocking was that amongst these one hundred new students, twenty-some students were actually transferring from other academies.

It was shocking because the 'other academies' mentioned here naturally did not mean the regular schools of the capital, but rather the Heavenly Dao Academy, the Temple Seminary, and the other such schools of the Ivy Academies that were just as famous as the Orthodox Academy.

Gazing at those names on the list, Priest Xin was rather worried, wondering if this might cause some problems or stir up some trouble...

"These students are, for the most part, already in the initial level of Meditation. While they can be considered decent when compared to the students from the counties, they aren't much in a place like the Heavenly Dao Academy and definitely wouldn't be given any special attention. It's only because of that they would think about transferring to us. Since they weren't valued in the first place, these schools which they came shouldn't care that much," Tang Thirty-Six concluded.

"But still...stolen food still tastes good." Priest Xin choked his way through this rather graceless set of words, then continued, "Moreover, the situation recently has been rather tense."

"The so-called All-School Martial Exhibition is truthfully just the Tianhai clan using its authority to suppress others. It doesn't really have much to do with the schools themselves."

Tang Thirty-Six added, "In addition, Chen Changsheng is the future Pope, and the Six Ivies will all belong to him. If he were to ask for a few students in advance, what's so extraordinary about that?"

Hearing these words and then recalling how Tang Thirty-Six had stood in front of the Orthodox Academy and cursed two Storms of the Eight Directions while pointing at Bie Tianxin, Priest Xin realized that Tang Thirty-Six really didn't care. Shaking his head, he ceased discussing the topic.

Enrolling new students was naturally not so simple as just taking a test.

In the next few days, the Orthodox Academy became a hive of activity. The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education sent over many artisans and laborers, transforming the once-lifeless school grounds into a humming construction site. Fortunately, the academy had already undergone a complete renovation in the spring of last year. The foundation had already been laid, so only a brief amount of time was needed to bring the project to a smooth conclusion.

The Orthodox Academy had vast tracts of unused land, but not all of it was needed. Only a small portion was needed to accommodate these one hundred new students. The small building that Chen Changsheng and the rest had grown used to living in, as well as the lake and forest which held a special significance to them, were partitioned off by a newly-built wall. It maintained for them a relative sense of independence, and it would also presumably be less noisy in the future.

The library had an array and the books within were not easily moved. As a result, it was left outside the walls, open for all students to use.

The gardens partitioned off by the wall, close to the Hundred Herb Garden and the Imperial Palace, now received a new name: the Separate (Bie) Garden.

The first time Priest Xin heard this name, he had the burning desire to ask whether this name had anything to do with that Bie Tianxin who departed in disgrace the other day.

Brand new bedding was sent over, brand new copies of the Orthodoxy's rules and teaching materials were transported within, and brand new school uniforms were distributed to the students. Smoke began to rise from the chimneys of the cafeteria and the fountain began to shoot water into the air, greatly cooling the sizzling heat of the summer nights. Everything had been made ready. The new students nervously and excitedly waited for the day when classes would formally begin.

Tomorrow, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education would send over the lecturers and teachers it had selected in the past few days. Simultaneously, it would also be sending over a big list of expenses.

Tonight, Chen Changsheng took a stroll around the Orthodox Academy, looking to see if there was any place that wasn't right. It was only then that he realized that the Orthodox Academy was actually so big. He had lived there for an entire year, but he had only lived in an area tantamount to one-tenth of the school.

Seeing the brightly lit library and looking through the windows at those students eagerly studying the books of the Orthodox Academy, he felt very good.

His teacher was the previous Principal of the Orthodox Academy. He was the current Principal of the Orthodox Academy.

Under his teacher's hands, the Orthodox Academy had fallen into ruin. Now it seemed that the Orthodox Academy was on the verge of being reborn under his hands.

This sort of feeling really was very good, even though he still was completely mystified as to why Tang Thirty-Six wanted to do all of this.

Returning to the small building, he treated Zhexiu's injuries, and then he and Tang Thirty-Six gave a final lookover of the register of new students. Surprisingly, they saw a very familiar name on it and couldn't help but be shocked.

"Did he come?" Chen Changsheng pointed at the name and asked to Tang Thirty-Six.

"I didn't see the person. I heard he's still in the Mausoleum of Books. Apparently, he had one of his juniors of the Li Palace Academy come and apply in his place."

Tang Thirty-Six offered, "If you think it's against the rules, I'll have someone send a message and tell him not to come."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Other transfer students are fine, but if he really did come, the Li Palace Academy would definitely be unwilling to accept it."

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "It's not like we went crying and yelling to plead him to come. Why are you worrying so much?"

Chen Changsheng thought this was right, so he changed the subject. "What about the matter of Bie Tianxin?"

They were both keenly aware of the enormous humiliation Bie Tianxin had suffered that day. It was inevitable that after restraining himself for a while, he would want to return the favor through a match.

Tang Thirty-Six pointed at the pile of letters of challenge on the bookshelf, noting, "We already have one-hundred-and-thirty-four matches waiting for us; if we throw on another louse, will it make us itch any more?"

"Where did the Tianhai clan get all these experts from?" Chen Changsheng was rather confused, thinking to himself, with all these cultivation experts obeying the orders of the Tianhai clan, couldn't they destroy a country?

"If it was one of those small kingdoms in the northwest, the Tianhai clan could destroy them with a wave of the hand. But if this number of experts were placed amongst the entire continent, it would be too exaggerated of a number. The Mount Li Sword Sect could definitely send out this many people," Tang Thirty-Six noted. "In addition, this should be about it. Probably, after we deal with this batch, there will be a pause."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Can we deal with them?"

"Of course we can't, even if we disregard the fact that there are experts like Bie Tianxin within that pile. Or else why would we need to enroll so many new students?" Tang Thirty-Six said.

Chen Changsheng thought it over, saying, "It's best not to fight. I'm worried that there will be injuries."

Tang Thirty-Six argued, "Without experiencing battle, how can they quickly mature? Their foundation was already lacking, so it's only right that they work even harder. Moreover, this matter still primarily rests on you."

Saying this, the two brought down that pile of letters from the bookshelf and then began to arrange them. Chen Changsheng seriously performed calculations while Tang Thirty-Six recorded with a brush on the side. They first picked out all the challengers at Ethereal Opening and below and then Chen Changsheng picked a corresponding student to fight in the match. As for how and why the student was chosen, Tang Thirty-Six did not understand. Precisely as he had said, this matter rested on Chen Changsheng because only he knew the Intellectual Sword.

What Chen Changsheng was doing at this very moment was taking these hundred-plus matches of the All-School Martial Exhibition and converting them into a single battle.

His sword was all the students of the Orthodox Academy.

How those new students would fight depended on the quality of Chen Changsheng's swordplay.

Watching Chen Changsheng perform these calculations with such single-minded devotion, Tang Thirty-Six suddenly sighed, "Your fate really is good."

This was not the first time someone had said Chen Changsheng's fate was good, nor was it the first time Tang Thirty-Six had said that his fate was good.

Chen Changsheng knew that Tang Thirty-Six was sighing about all of his lucky encounters. He was able to discover the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou, able to battle with those demon experts, able to meet with Su Li and carry him back south and thus learn those three swords. Shaking his head, he suddenly thought of something. Raising his head, he asked Tang Thirty-Six, "Do you want to learn?"

Naturally, he was speaking of those three swords.

After all, when Su Li was teaching him those three swords on their journey, there was nothing about not being able to pass the swords down to others.

He had even wondered if he could make these three swords part of the required curriculum of the Orthodox Academy.

As for whether Su Li would be angry or not, that would be something to consider in the future...

Tang Thirty-Six did not reveal a joyous expression, nor did he seem excited. Instead, he looked as if he was staring at an idiot.

Chen Changsheng asked anxiously, "What's up? What did I say

wrong?"

Tang Thirty-Six sighed, "If I didn't know you so well, I would definitely think you were deliberately humiliating me."

Chen Changsheng felt very wronged. How did his good intentions become a humiliation?

"I can't learn these three swords," Tang Thirty-Six said, "so in the future, I ask that you please not bring up this matter anymore to humiliate my intelligence, do you get it?"

Chen Changsheng's eyes widened as he asked, "Why can't you learn it?"

Tang Thirty-Six furiously replied, "I just can't stand that innocent face of yours! Why can't I learn it? You ask me, I ask who can? You think that if you can learn, everyone in the world can learn it? Then why is it that Su Li, in his entire life, only taught you three? Besides you and Qiushan Jun as well as his own daughter, why didn't he go and teach it to his disciples and granddisciples in the Mount Li Sword Sect?"

At this moment, for some inexplicable reason, Zhexiu, while lying on the bed, suddenly opened his eyes.

Tang Thirty-Six was currently in a terrible mood, so he yelled at Zhexiu, "You know how to wake up on hearing her name? Not playing dead anymore? Pervert!"

Zhexiu fell into thought, then replied, "When I'm recovered, I'm going to beat you up."

Tang Thirty-Six had no fear of him. Sneering, he replied, "Then if you have the capability, hurry up and do it! Don't say so many useless things! I'm discussing things with Chen Changsheng, you just go to sleep!"

Zhexiu was rather straightforward and able to adapt to the circumstances. Seeing that they weren't talking about Qi Jian, he truly did close his eyes and return to his rest.

Chapter 478 - Sword Techniques Originate From The Mouth (II)

Chen Changsheng began to understand. He said uncertainly, "The third sword really is rather difficult. Based off what Su Li said, even he couldn't learn it. But the other two swords..."

He was originally planning to say that when he was learning them, he didn't feel it to be difficult at all. However, upon seeing Tang Thirty-Six's complexion, he with great difficulty swallowed back down the second part of his statement. Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "The second sword is clearly a technique Su Li created to address the problem of your meridians, so how can we learn it? As for the first sword, it requires far too much calculation ability. Did you think anyone could do it?"

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, Lady Chujian's calculation ability is much stronger than mine.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and asked in an exceptionally serious tone, "Chen Changsheng...do you really not know that you're a genius?"

Chen Changsheng considered the question. My memory is rather good, and as for my calculation ability, it should have been greatly strengthened in the Mausoleum of Books. As for me being a genius... He shook his head.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "When we first met at the Heavenly Dao Academy, what did I say to you?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "You said that I was a genius."

Tang Thirty-Six patted him on the shoulder, "Believe me, I've never evaluated a person wrongly."

Chen Changsheng thought about this but couldn't find a way to respond.

Tang Thirty-Six added, "Right, you have to teach me the True Sword of the Orthodoxy and Toppling Mountain Staff."

Puzzled, Chen Changsheng asked, "You're not even willing to glance at the secrets of the Mount Li Sword Style, so why do you want to learn those?"

"I'm a student of the Orthodox Academy, so it's only natural that I learn the sword styles of the Orthodox Academy. What would I do with the Mount Li Sword Style?" Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng as if he was an idiot, the fact that he had praised him as a genius just a few moments ago already forgotten. "In addition, since I plan to be the academy superintendent, if it came out that I didn't know these two sword styles, wouldn't I be making a fool of myself?"

In the past, the True Sword of the Orthodoxy was the basic sword style that every expert of the Orthodox Academy could use. It was by no means lacking in might, but it didn't have many techniques.

As for the Toppling Mountain Staff, it wasn't actually a sword style, but rather the staff style used in the past by the lecturers in charge of discipline to punish disobedient students.

Yes, Chen Changsheng would become Principal of the new Orthodox Academy and Tang Thirty-Six would become the new Orthodox Academy's first academy superintendent. The housekeeping supervisor for the new Orthodox Academy would be Xuanyuan Po. Zhexiu was still recovering, but his position had also been taken care of already. In the future, he would be responsible for teaching the students of the Orthodox Academy how to fight and the skill necessary to survive in the snowy plains of the land of demons. Of course, the Orthodox Academy still had a most exalted position left for Luoluo. It was the lifelong position as honorary Vice Principal, and the rules of the new academy clearly stated that the Orthodox Academy would no longer appoint anyone to the seat of Vice Principal.

On a certain day at the height of summer, the street outside Hundred Flowers Lane was densely packed with people, while within the lane, colored flags fluttered in the wind.

After twenty years, the Orthodox Academy finally formally reopened.

To many elders within the Orthodoxy, this was a grand occasion. It couldn't be counted how many old priests soaked the front of their gowns in tears.

To the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, this was the greatest legacy left behind by the late archbishop and also his most

cherished desire. Many priests and officials were filled with happiness as well as a dull sense of grief.

To the Imperial clan, this was the first time after so many years of silence that they were finally able to make their voice heard to the rest of the continent. Although Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six definitely did not think this way, this did not make them completely forget when Prince Chen Liu attended the ceremony that many eyes were watching them and that the Divine Empress would perhaps soon learn of this danger, causing them to stroke a tree in comfort and sigh with boundless regret.

To the one hundred new students of the Orthodox Academy, this was the beginning of their brand new lives and also their greatest opportunity.

To the Tianhai clan and the new faction of the Orthodoxy, this was a rather dangerous signal.

As for Mo Yu, this...was a joke.

"You being the principal is fine. In any case, it was His Holiness's sacred words that arbitrarily decided it. Princess Luoluo is also fine, since it's only in name anyway. But for Tang Tang, that guy who can't even supervise himself, to actually become academy superintendent? You don't think that he's most likely going to take the students to get completely drunk and then have them skip class every day? That black bear acting as housekeeping supervisor? You're not worried that even if Clear Lake Restaurant's head chef, for the sake of money, cooked a massive number of dishes, he would eat it all up?"

Mo Yu was laughing so hard that she was shaking. "And the most hilarious of all is Zhexiu! Teach students how to survive? When the time comes, he would bury the students in the snow and say 'if you come out before seven days, you fail!' Hey, I have to ask, just how many coffins have you guys prepared?"

This place was Chen Changsheng's room in the small building. He sat across from her, seeming rather exhausted. This exhaustion primarily had to do with the fact that there had been too many things to do today. Of course, it assuredly had something to do with her teasing him to her heart's content as well.

Mo Yu's visit to the Orthodox Academy today was naturally to get in on the fun and at the same time to see a comedy. She didn't make a formal appearance, instead waiting until everything had concluded before noiselessly appearing in his room. However, for some reason, she had clearly dressed herself in an extremely fine fashion before coming. She was even more exquisite and beautiful than usual, her beauty rather moving.

"From the principal to its superintendent, of the current people in charge of the Orthodox Academy, not a one of them is actually over the age of twenty...are you guys playing house?"

Mo Yu's laugh was even more joyous and the golden flower stuck in her hair shook even more intensely.

"Isn't this all because your faction forced us to?" Chen Changsheng didn't want to hear this sort of teasing anymore, so he

changed the subject. "Why are you dressed so formally today? Was there an event at the Imperial Court?"

Mo Yu was a little taken aback. She usually dressed like this. What was different now?

Suddenly, she recalled that besides their first meeting in the Night Palace, the following meetings between her and Chen Changsheng had mostly been at night, and it was often because she wanted to sleep on his bed or was already sleeping on his bed. At those times, she would naturally not put on makeup or wear any fancy clothes. She would only come after taking a bath, revealing her plain face. Presumably, there truly was an extremely significant difference from her appearances of the past.

Upon thinking of this, she felt a little ashamed, but then she recalled that the last time she had come, Chen Changsheng had told her to bathe herself clean before sleeping on his bed, and then she couldn't help but get a little angry. She gave him a hateful glare, then flew through the window like the wind, vanishing into the forest.

Chen Changsheng thought in confusion, what Tang Thirty-Six said was reasonable, females really are the most difficult-to-understand thing in the world. I obviously didn't even say anything, so why did she suddenly become unhappy?

He had not lied to Mo Yu. The Orthodox Academy had thought to enroll new students mainly because the pressure exerted by the Tianhai clan and the new faction of the Orthodoxy had been too great, because there had been too many people wishing to

challenge the Orthodox Academy. It was just that those words of Bie Tianxin accusing them of harboring evil motives and Tang Thirty-Six's subsequent promise from that day had already spread far and wide. As a result, many people, including the one hundred new students of the Orthodox Academy, were very curious to know just what the Orthodox Academy would do about it.

On the early morning of the next day, the challenges that had ceased for several days began once more. The common folk of the capital that had rested for several days quickly spread the news and came over with both their old and young. The gate of the Orthodox Academy once more became bustling beyond compare.

Last night, Chen Changsheng had prepared the list of opponents and had even given pointers to those new students that would go out to battle. He had expended far too much of his mental strength and so did not appear this time, remaining in the academy to rest.

Tang Thirty-Six brought out thirty-odd new students and stood before the gate of the Orthodox Academy. Leaving aside everything else, just the sight of those students all wearing orderly school uniforms made them seem very energetic and imposing.

By this time, the first challenger had already walked up. Clasping his hands, he said, "Please instruct me."

This person came from the Li Palace Academy, his level of cultivation at the initial level of Ethereal Opening.

He was very interested to know who the Orthodox Academy was

prepared to send out against him. Of course, he was keenly aware that he was no match for Chen Changsheng and the rest of his group, but seeing the current state of affairs, it was blatantly obvious that the Orthodox Academy intended to send out new students. It was just that it was obvious that none of the students behind Tang Thirty-Six had successfully entered Ethereal Opening. On what basis could they come out and fight?

Tang Thirty-Six couldn't care less for what he or the spectators were thinking about. Looking at the list in his hands, he announced, "Chen Fugui, step forward."

As his voice rang out, a new student pushed his way past his schoolmates. This student was not that old, but his body was incredibly strong and sturdy, just like a smaller version of Xuanyuan Po.

Without any sloppiness whatsoever, Tang Thirty-Six pointed at the challenger from the Li Palace Academy and asked, "Can you beat him or not?"

The new student called Chen Fugui vigorously slapped his chest. "I have to fight him before I can know that."

"Bold." Tang Thirty-Six seemed to be praising him, but there was no sense of excitement on his face. He smoothly and cleanly declared, "Then go fight him."

"Okay!" that student called Chen Fugui yelled out. He leaped off the stone steps like a fierce tiger emerging from the mountains,

rushing at the challenger from the Li Palace Academy.

The challenger was startled by this noise, thinking to himself, could it be that this is a hidden expert of the Orthodox Academy? As his mind shifted, he saw that student seeming to pounce upon him like a tiger, then suddenly associated this with that Princess Luoluo of the Orthodox Academy, which he then associated with the most frightening abilities of the White Emperor. His spiritual sense couldn't help but fall into disarray as he felt that this technique was extremely similar to that technique of legends. He subconsciously revealed a hint of cowardice.

Before a battle, one had to particularly make sure that their Qi was steady and that their mind was in order. His mind was now in a small panic, and so his Qi naturally followed suit. Inevitably, his movement became somewhat slowed. That new student's fist was about the size of an earthen bowl and already right in front of him. He was worried that this fist contained some sort of fierce technique and was afraid to firmly receive it. He swiftly retreated, but his sudden retreat was not enough to avoid the updraft from this student's fist. His face was struck by this wind, which felt rather raw and hot.

The pain from this heat made him completely sober up.

He astonishingly realized that although this student's fist style seemed very berserk, it clearly had only the form and none of the energy. Moreover, the true essence imbued in those two earthen-bowl-sized fists was pitiful! This was just a normal student who had just entered the initial level of Meditation. He had actually treated him as some powerful enemy and had almost suffered a

loss! This challenger from the Li Palace grew furious, angry at himself for his foolishness as well as his opponent's weak momentum. With a cry, he sent his sword slashing down.

"Stop."

At this moment, a voice rang out, calm and forceful. It was like it had something important to say, at least something that was countless times more important than this match.

The challenger inadvertently halted his sword in the air and turned towards that voice.

Chapter 479 - Sword Techniques Originate From The Mouth (III)

Tang Thirty-Six descended from the stone steps and stood beside that student called Chen Fugui. Looking him over, he nodded, and said, "Your performance was not bad. In the future, you will learn the 'Tiger Charging Through the Dark Forest'."

Chen Fugui was a little surprised at these words, but upon realizing what Tang Thirty-Six had just said, revealed an ecstatic expression. His voice trembling, he said, "Many thanks to Superintendent, many thanks to Superintendent."

Tang Thirty-Six turned around to those several dozen students behind him. "Do you see? Just like what was said last night, when two armies battle, what's most important is vigor! Who care if you're not the enemy's opponent! You have to fight to find out. In addition, before you attack, you absolutely cannot think of yourself as inferior to your opponent. This is called, 'I would rather be beaten to death than scared to death'. It can also be called, 'if you can't beat someone to death, you still have to scare him to death'."

The students of the Orthodox Academy responded together, their voices ringing in unison. The gazes they aimed at Chen Fugui were filled with envy and yearning.

The challenger from the Li Palace Academy was left completely baffled by this scene. At this sight, he could no longer restrain his question, "What's going on here? Are we not fighting anymore?"

Tang Thirty-Six asked Chen Fugui, "Can you beat him?"

Before the match, he had asked this question. Chen Fugui had replied then that he could only know after fighting. Now that they had fought...

He very honestly admitted, "I can't beat him."

"Don't be discouraged. You only reached the initial level of Meditation not two months ago, it's only right that you're no match for an Ethereal Opening cultivator. It's not like you're some exceptional genius like me or Principal Chen."

Tang Thirty-Six patted him on his broad shoulder and soothed, "Summarize this match tonight, and then prepare everything you need for your studies."

The spectators thought to themselves, the match just started and barely anything was done. Just what is there to summarize?

The challenger from the Li Palace Academy watched as Chen Fugui walked back to the stone steps. Quite at a loss for what to do, he asked Tang Thirty-Six, "And then?"

The match had just started and he hadn't even had time to use his sword before the shout came to stop. Then...shouldn't it be that they should continue to fight?

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him like he was an idiot, saying, "Since he can't beat you, he naturally concedes."

The challenger this time really did look a little silly. He was in a daze for quite a while before sobering up and asking in disbelief, "No way? It just ends like this?"

"What else? Do you want to stay and eat too? Our Orthodox Academy's cafeteria invited the chef of Clear Lake Restaurant to be cook. A normal person shouldn't even think about freeloading a meal."

Leaving the challenger with these words, Tang Thirty-Six returned to the stone steps of the Orthodox Academy to prepare for the second match.

The challenger from the Li Palace Academy was furious. His Qi suddenly spiked and the sword in his hand became infused with a cold energy.

Tang Thirty-Six halted and turned back. Expressionlessly, he declared, "Take another step forward and try."

On both sides of the Orthodox Academy's gate, two squadrons of Orthodoxy cavalry held cold spears in hand as they coldly kept watch.

Above the walls of the academy, one could barely make out the presence of crossbow bolts.

The surrounding crowd of spectators realized what the Orthodox Academy was prepared to do. The crowd parted with a flurry of noise, which was quickly suppressed into silence by the murderous intent pervading the scene.

"The Orthodox Academy...are you preparing to act shamelessly?"

A cold voice came from the street, its owner probably amongst the group of experts that had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six ignored that person. Walking back to the group of students, he looked at the list in his hand and yelled, "Which one of you is Fu Xinzhi?"

One person stepped forward. It was precisely that young scholar who had appeared so self-confident on that day when the Orthodox Academy was recruiting new students.

Tang Thirty-Six said to him, "Amongst your schoolmates, your cultivation is strongest. Put up a good performance and show those outsiders the true strength of our Orthodox Academy!"

Fu Xinzhi clasped his hands in respect. He slowly took out his longsword from its sheath. As he walked onto the field, his bearing was quite calm.

That challenger from the Li Palace was still standing there, no

one paying him any attention whatsoever. Standing there by himself, he seemed rather pitiful and rather ridiculous.

He was clearly the victor of the battle, but where was the slightest bit of happiness from victory?

He shot a hateful stare at Tang Thirty-Six, and then, with a sweep of his sleeve, departed.

The next to come after him was similarly a swordsman at the middle level of Ethereal Opening. As for which school he was representing, Tang Thirty-Six could no longer remember. He could only remember that Chen Changsheng had explicitly told him last night that Fu Xinzhi's opponent could only be this swordsman. Chen Changsheng had even written a few very detailed notes on the list, saying just how Fu Xinzhi should attack and the maximum number of attacks he would be able to use.

Time passed rather slowly, or the first match had ended too quickly. It was still early morning, and although it was still the height of summer, it wasn't very hot.

Fu Xinzhi gripped his sword and stood on the flat ground in front of the Orthodox Academy. A cool breeze swept over him, wafting up his sleeves and giving him an unearthly feeling.

His opponent was also a swordsman. With the sun shining on his blue garments and the chilliness of his sword, he also gave off an extremely fine demeanor.

At this scene, the spectators who still felt rather dejected from the first battle's preposterous end instantly became energetic once more.

The swordsman expressionlessly declared, "Please."

As Fu Xinzhi looked at his opponent's face in the morning light, he seemed calm. In reality, only he knew just how nervous he was.

He was a student from Suiyang County. Unlike the students of the capital, he did not have access to knowledge of cultivation at a young age. Although his talent was decent, his strength had always been lacking.

As for battle prowess...in Suiyang County, he had never truly fought with another person.

Today was his first real battle in his entire life, and his opponent was at the middle level of Ethereal Opening, someone who he would have found impossible to imagine as an opponent back in Suiyang County, and who he would have regarded as a senior!

How could he not be nervous?

"You can't be nervous." This was what Principal Chen had repeated to him the most last night.

"Emphasize vigor. Vigor is not only in ferocity, but also in neatness." From morning class to now, this was the principle that

the academy superintendent had constantly repeated.

In his mind, he recalled once more the form, speed, and true essence circulation of the techniques that Principal Chen had imparted to him last night, and then he took a deep breath.

He calmed down, and then attacked.

With a whoosh, it seemed like a storm had suddenly sprung up in front of the Orthodox Academy.

First Stance of the Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong: Rising Flurry!

With exceptional swiftness, his sword pierced through that storm and arrived in front of that swordsman.

That swordsman was still expressionless. His sword rose up from its sheath, confronting his opponent's sword with a majestic true essence that knocked Fu Xinzhi's sword far away from its original trajectory.

Fu Xinzhi was not alarmed.

For some reason, it was just like what Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six had said to all the new students last night...

The moment he made the first strike, his usual reverence that he

had for Ethereal Opening cultivators back in Suiyang County vanished without a trace.

In addition, the current situation was just like he had practiced several times last night. His sword was in precisely that position, the position that Principal Chen had calculated.

That position was exceptionally good, exceptionally good for using the fifth stance of the Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong.

With a steady mind, he calmed his Qi. His sword energy suddenly rose up, the wind and rain abruptly kicked up. From his leaning position, he once more stabbed at his opponent.

Simultaneously, he counted in his mind, "This is my second strike."

Last night, Principal Chen had said that if he was able to use four moves against this powerful opponent, then it could be considered a success.

Clangclangclang!

Sword glows incessantly flashed and then vanished.

The wind and the rain in front of the Orthodox Academy similarly vanished, leaving behind only the clear and bright weather which would soon turn hot.

That swordsman still stood expressionlessly at his original position. There were no wounds on his body and only an extremely small cut on the front of his blue gown.

Fu Xinzhi grasped his sword, his chest rising up and down. An extremely deep wound had appeared on his left arm and blood was flowing out of it.

But it seemed like he couldn't feel the pain. His eyes were extremely bright, and it was obvious that he was extremely emotional and excited.

It was naturally impossible for him to obtain victory. Although he was the strongest amongst this batch of new students, the gap between him and the Ethereal Opening Realm was still impossible to cross.

But he used four moves.

This was the most important matter and also that which Chen Changsheng hoped that he could do.

So not only did he not feel defeated in the slightest, he was even filled with a boundless sense of heroism.

He hadn't even been in the Orthodox Academy for five days, but he could actually exchange four successive blows with an Ethereal Opening expert!

Then if he continued to study at the Orthodox Academy a little longer, just how far could he walk?

He looked into the eyes of that swordsman, thinking to himself, next year, I only need until next year, and then I will definitely be able to defeat you!

"Why are you still standing there?"

Tang Thirty-Six's voice came from the Orthodox Academy's gate.

Fu Xinzhi awoke from his reverie, sheathed his sword, bowed to the swordsman, then returned.

The swordsman was not angry like the challenger from the Li Palace Academy, nor did he attempt to block him. In addition, it was very obvious that it had nothing to do with the Orthodoxy cavalry or the crossbow bolts atop the wall.

Tang Thirty-Six watched as Fu Xinzhi returned, saying, "According to last night's calculations, if you managed to use four moves, you really could have been injured, but it shouldn't have been so serious."

Only after Fu Xinzhi returned did his schoolmates realize how deep his wound was. They could even barely make out the bone.

"For the final move, I went a little deeper. Because...I really wanted to try and see if I could stab my opponent," he said rather nervously.

His final move was unable to stab into his opponent's body. It had only been able to leave an extremely small cut on his opponent's clothes. If one didn't carefully look for it, it was almost impossible to see.

Tang Thirty-Six asked him, "Do you think it was worth it?"

To exchange a wound so deep that it almost reached the bone for a tiny hole on one's opponent's clothes, anyone would feel that it wasn't worth it.

But Fu Xinzhi seriously considered the question, then said, "I think it was worth it."

"If you think it was worth it, then it's worth it." Tang Thirty-Six revealed a smile and said contentedly, "For instance, if I think you're pretty good, then you really are pretty good."

At this moment, the swordsman's voice suddenly rang out.

For some reason, the swordsman's voice was slightly trembling, whether out of fear or excitement.

"Good swordplay."

As he said this, he didn't look at Fu Xinzhi, but rather at Tang Thirty-Six.

It was not fear, but excitement, like the shock after seeing the wondrous scene of the sea of clouds atop a famous mountain.

With Fu Xinzhi's cultivation, for him to be able to learn the Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong, even if it was only two moves, was already enough to shock others.

However, this swordsman's shock and praise were not because of this.

What truly shocked him was the person that taught Fu Xinzhi this sword style.

Chapter 480 - Sword Techniques Originate From The Mouth (IV)

This swordsman was at the middle level of Ethereal Opening. In principle, he should have been able to casually dispatch a youth still in Meditation. However, Fu Xinzhi's first strike had come too quickly, forcing him into a defensive posture. And just when he was ready to switch from defense to offense, Fu Xinzhi's second strike had come just as swiftly as the first.

That it could be this fast indicated that there were no slow movements in between Fu Xinzhi's two moves.

And the first and fifth stances of the Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong were, generally speaking, very difficult to combine together, much less in such a smooth manner.

The problem was that his sword had knocked Fu Xinzhi's sword upwards.

It was that position, that precise angle, that allowed Fu Xinzhi to bring his two strikes together and attack like lightning.

He had seen the Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong, but he had never imagined that it could be used in this manner.

What shocked him even more was Fu Xinzhi's third and fourth strikes.

Those two sword techniques were of the True Sword of the Orthodoxy.

Switching so suddenly from the Wind and Rain Sword of Mount Zhong to the True Sword of the Orthodoxy, how could the transition be so smooth? And to be so wondrous that it felt almost natural?

They were clearly not of the same sword style, so just why did they seem like interlinking techniques formed from a thousand years of accumulated knowledge on the path of the sword?

To this swordsman, these four strikes had truly been too wondrous, and too frightening.

He clearly understood that if it were not for the fact that Fu Xinzhi's cultivation was a far cry from his own, he really would have had no way to respond to these four strikes.

In other words, if Fu Xinzhi were able to break into Ethereal Opening, then even if he was still one level below, he would still be able to use these four strikes to threaten the swordsman.

These four strikes were naturally impossible for a new student of the Orthodox Academy who had come from some county to think of.

Moreover, when Fu Xinzhi had been changing sword techniques, he seemed to have a remarkably precise judgment of the situation.

This was even clearer evidence that someone had planned it for him in advance.

Who could calculate all the details of today's match and even provide such immaculate responses?

When the swordsman imagined how such a person really could exist in this world, his body felt both cold and hot at the same time.

When he thought of how a person was actually able to progress so far on the path of the sword, he became extremely excited, wanting nothing more than to drink to his heart's content in celebration!

"This...is Principal Chen's swordplay?" he asked Tang Thirty-Six in a shaky voice.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Yes."

After a long period of silence, the swordsman was able to somewhat calm his shock. He sighed, "I heard that story from last year's Ivy Festival of how he and Gou Hanshi discussed swords. Every time I heard the particulars of the story, I felt that the storyteller was carrying it too far, that he was over-exaggerating it. After all, he was still only in the Meditation Realm back then. But now I know that on the path of the sword, there really are people who were born with the knowledge of it."

Upon hearing these words, Tang Thirty-Six very naturally recalled that scene from last year's Ivy Festival. He similarly sighed, "Let alone the fact that you didn't believe it, back when he was saying the sword techniques and I was carrying the sword, before I attacked, I also didn't believe that he would be able to help me defeat Qi Jian. But that guy managed to do it."

The swordsman sighed once more, "This level of talent in the path of the sword really does make one gasp in shock."

"I will relay your praise to him. It's just that he definitely won't admit that he's a genius of the path of the sword..."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "He would just say that he was only more diligent and hardworking, and his memory is better than most."

The swordsman was stunned by these. He thought to himself, this level of talent in the path of the sword is such that even a blind man could see it, how could he deny it... He didn't know what to say.

"I also feel that his appearance when he says it is very infuriating. Yeah, at times, it's even more infuriating than me."

Tang Thirty-Six clasped his hands and bowed towards the swordsman.

The swordsman nodded his head and made his way to the back of the ground. However, he did not stand together with the other

experts from the Tianhai clan, but continued to walk further away.

One could believe that he would walk very far, all the way until he crossed over the Bridge of Helplessness, walked out the city gates, and then headed off towards the vast and boundless world.

Today, he saw for the first time that the path of the sword was as vast as the sea. How could he continue to remain in the small city that was the capital?

The third match very quickly arrived.

This expert challenging the Orthodox Academy had a sinister expression. He was clearly not a good person, and he made no attempt to conceal the killing intent in his eyes.

The person representing the Orthodox Academy in this match was a transfer student from the Heavenly Dao Academy called Chu Wenbin.

"Senior Brother...the situation doesn't seem quite right," Chu Wenbin whispered as he looked at that expert.

He was once a student of the Heavenly Dao Academy, and Tang Thirty-Six was also once a student of the Heavenly Dao Academy. They had originally been acquainted, and now they had both become students of the Orthodox Academy. Although they couldn't be said to have sympathized with each other's misery, there was at least a rather different connection between the two of

them. As he was nervous, he fell into his old habit of addressing Tang Thirty-Six as 'Senior Brother' and had even forgotten that he should have said 'Academy Superintendent'. Tang Thirty-Six, who cared about this point quite a lot, was actually not that angry.

"What's up?" Tang Thirty-Six leaned his body and asked.

Chu Wenbin timidly glanced at the field of battle and said, "That person seems rather vicious."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Last night, Chen Changsheng taught you a technique that was meant to deal with this person. If your luck is good, you might be able to take advantage over him...even if you are afraid, it's impossible to find someone to switch with you."

Chu Wenbin felt rather helpless. Holding his sword, he descended the stone steps.

The expert with his sinister expression stared at Chu Wenbin whose skin was as white as a girl's and revealed an indescribably cold and gloomy smile. "As it turns out, there really are people who aren't afraid of death."

Chu Wenbin was scared out of his wits by this smile. Turning to Tang Thirty-Six, he declared, "Senior Brother, he scares me."

Tang Thirty-Six perked his brows and then looked at that expert. "I say, if you're going to fight, just fight. Just what nonsense are you babbling?"

The expert's smile faded away and he replied with a threatening chill, "Does the Orthodox Academy not even dare to listen to a few words of truth?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "If you have the capability, then today you can just beat him to death for me to see."

Chu Wenbin was stupefied at these words. Senior Brother, these words of yours were said in a very cool fashion and with an extremely imposing manner, but...this life is mine!

The expert sneered, "And if I were to beat him to death, what then?"

Tang Thirty-Six pursed his lips.

Just like Chen Changsheng in Clear Lake Restaurant, he could also sense this person's...killing intent.

"The rules of the All-School Martial Exhibition have no line saying it was allowed to beat someone to death."

He emotionlessly gazed at the expert and said, "If you wish to break the rules, I naturally have my ways of playing that aren't according to the rules."

The expert began to laugh. Paired with his pale face and gloomy

expression, his smile seemed particularly terrifying. "As my clan's young lord just said a few days ago, blades and swords have no eyes."

Hearing this, the crowd realized that this person was actually a subordinate of Bie Tianxin or a servant of his family.

He was only a subordinate or even a servant, but to be able to follow Bie Tianxin across the world and ease the minds of those two Storms of the Eight Directions...this person was necessarily incredibly powerful and frightening.

"Blades and swords have no eyes, but it's not like you're blind."

Tang Thirty-Six stared at him and said, "If it's improper, I will naturally yell to stop."

The servant from the Bie clan smirked, "For what reason should I stop if the young master of the Tang clan yells to stop? In addition, these students of the Orthodox Academy are too weak. If I fight normally, it wouldn't be out of the question for me to accidentally kill him through a momentary slip of the hand."

"A slip of the hand?" Tang Thirty-Six's brows leapt upwards like swords about to fly from their sheaths.

The servant seemed to very carefully explain, "A slip of the hand means that I can't stop myself in time."

"What you said is correct. The new students of our Orthodox Academy really are comparatively weak. Compared to them, you lot are absolutely experts. When the strong are bullying the weak, for someone to still be unable to stop..."

Tang Thirty-Six calmly gazed at him. "Then perhaps it might be better if I have your entire family stop."

The Bie family servant's expression seemed to show a hint of fear. "Sir should know very well that I am a person of the Bie family."

"Of course I know that you're a servant of the Bie family, Ye Xingqing."

Tang Thirty-Six stared at him and said, "But your own family resides in Shannan County, wielding the power of the Bie family to oppress the people of the countryside, committing every sort of crime and occupying vast tracts of good farmland. I even hear that your son is serving as a county magistrate?"

These words caused this servant of the Bie clan called Ye Xingqing to suddenly shift expressions. He sternly yelled, "Just what do you mean with these words?"

"My meaning is, I know who you are."

Tang Thirty-Six ceased to look at him, instead turning to the back of the crowd at that group of experts that had come to

challenge the Orthodox Academy on the Tianhai clan's orders. "All of you, I know who each one of you is. So, if you need to fight, then fight, but if any one of you tries to make a big scene, says any more things like 'I couldn't stop myself in time', then I might as well have all of your families stop."

Then he turned back to Ye Xingqing and asked, "Now do you understand?"

There were many things in this world that could be stopped, like swords, or words, and also future prospects, and even life.

As he spoke, he gave off none of his usual arrogance and pomposity.

It was precisely because of this that everyone on the scene knew that he spoke the truth, not merely some malicious words.

Yes, even the Orthodox Academy could do nothing to the Bie family. After all, behind it stood two Storms of the Eight Directions.

However, Ye Xingqing was just a servant of the Bie family. He had his own family and his own family members. Thus, before he threatened the Orthodox Academy, he should have first clearly comprehended the fact that the Orthodox Academy could very easily threaten him.

After Tang Thirty-Six very clearly said these words, Ye Xingqing

clearly understood. As a result, his complexion became abnormally unsightly.

"Senior Brother, you truly are extraordinary."

Chu Wenbin's timidity gradually retreated as he looked happily at Tang Thirty-Six.

In normal circumstances, Tang Thirty-Six would definitely have been very happy to be praised in such a manner, but he was not now. He knew that this matter would not be ended here. The most important thing was that he had once, right before the gates of the Orthodox Academy, announced to the entire capital that he would definitely not let these matches affect the new students. Consequently, he didn't want to take any risks.

The arrangements he and Chen Changsheng had made last night had temporarily come to a close.

Although it was a little inconsistent with the original plan, he still decided to personally go out.

It was at this point that a person walked out from the crowd. That person walked up to the gate of the Orthodox Academy and said, "Let me handle this one."

It was a young student, gentle and quiet, with a noble air about him. He gave off a proper and solemn sort of feeling.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and asked, "How could you have gotten so tanned?"

The young student glanced at him and replied leisurely, "You know, the pavilions of those last few monoliths are a little small and can't block out the sun."

Chapter 481 - The Unexpected Transfer Student

Tang Thirty-Six shifted his gaze down and then he couldn't help but laugh as he asked, "Then why are your hands so white?"

The young student replied, "Later on, I realized that if I buried my hands in my sleeves, they wouldn't be tanned by the sun and would naturally return to their original color."

Tang Thirty-Six took measure of the student, sensing the faint Qi exuding from his body. He said with some surprise, "Not bad, actually the middle level of Ethereal Opening."

The young student courteously replied, "Many thanks for your praise, but it's just average."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "There's no need to be modest. Although you're a little bit less than me, you're still pretty good."

The young student was a little taken aback. Although he had interacted with Tang Thirty-Six at both the Grand Examination and the Mausoleum of Books, he still wasn't that used to it yet. After thinking it over, he replied, "Your luck is good."

Tang Thirty-Six jeered, "When I exited the Mausoleum of Books, I was truthfully at the upper level of Ethereal Opening. You came out a month late but are only at the middle level of Ethereal Opening. What does that have to do with luck?"

The student pondered this again, then admitted, "What you say is reasonable. I really am inferior to you."

This person who spoke and acted with utmost care, even rather woodenly, who possessed a gentle and quiet air of nobility, was the student of the Li Palace Academy who had possessed the most potential in these past few years, Su Moyu.

In the past, Su Moyu had once stood on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace and questioned Chen Changsheng. But when he realized that his questions had no basis, he quickly admitted that he had been wrong and solemnly apologized. In the Grand Examination, he had even spent quite a bit of time with the people of the Orthodox Academy. His talent truly was outstanding, but because of his lack of luck in drawing lots, he was unable to advance very far. Later on when the group entered the Mausoleum of Books to comprehend the Dao, Chen Changsheng and the rest left before him. A month beforehand, Tang Thirty-Six and the remaining disciples of the Mausoleum of Books also left. Only Su Moyu, for some unknown reason, continued to stay in the Mausoleum of Books and view the monoliths. When Chen Changsheng and the rest learned of this, they even became rather concerned that this somewhat pedantic and wooden fellow had been enraptured by the Heavenly Tome Monoliths and was no longer willing to leave the Mausoleum of Books, instead choosing to become a Monolith Guardian.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Su Moyu and asked, "You've really decided to fight in his match?"

Su Moyu looked over at Ye Xingqing and said, "This match should be for me to fight."

Tang Thirty-Six did not hear the meaning hidden within these words.

Su Moyu was similar to Zhuang Huanyu who had committed suicide in that they were both outstanding students of the Six Ivies and celebrities in the capital. It was just that in the past year, Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy had stolen away quite a bit of his radiance. However, he was still recognized by quite a few people in the capital. As the news spread, the crowd was abuzz with discussion. Shocked and confused, they thought to themselves, just when did he become a student of the Orthodox Academy?

As Ye Xingqing listened to this discussion, his complexion turned even nastier. He looked at Su Moyu and hesitantly asked, "Is Sir... not a student of the Li Palace Academy?"

Tang Thirty-Six did not pay attention to the fact that he had addressed Su Moyu with such respect, saying, "Oh, he applied to the Orthodox Academy in advance."

He then turned to Su Moyu and asked, "Are you confident?"

This question was not at all unnecessary. After all, Ye Xingqing was no ordinary servant. He was a servant that had been taught by two of the Eight Storms.

Su Moyu had made the choice to leave the Mausoleum of Books because he had assuredly gotten stronger in every aspect, whether it was in cultivation or strength. However, he still might not be a match for this opponent!

Besides the fact that only the Wenshui Tang clan could bear the backlash from the Bie family, Tang Thirty-Six had also been prepared to personally go for this reason.

Su Moyu seemed to be thinking about something and did not respond.

Tang Thirty-Six thought it over, then said, "Although he's a servant of the Bie family, his martial arts don't follow the same path of those two powerful figures. Rather, he walks the path of the Putian River of Stars."

Su Moyu was rather shocked. It seemed that this was his first time hearing of this matter.

Ye Xingqing did not seem to care that the secret of his technique had been revealed. He only looked rather worriedly at Su Moyu.

"The Putian River of Stars is a strange and ferocious martial art. Upon receiving this information from the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education a few days ago, Chen Changsheng researched it and drew up a few plans."

Tang Thirty-Six pointed at Chu Wenbin, who had already

retreated to the stone steps, and said, "These plans were for him to use, but they would only help prop him up. But since you're the one that's going, you should be able to win."

He said this and then, not waiting for Su Moyu to respond, immediately explained the plans Chen Changsheng had drawn up.

The area in front of the Orthodox Academy became quiet. Only his voice could be heard.

If one could say that words contained swords, then what he said right now were the swords that Chen Changsheng had prepared for Ye Xingqing.

Just like the two previous battles.

Those commoners who had come to see the spectacle naturally could not understand.

However, the more the priests of the Li Palace and the experts who had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy listened, the more silent they became.

Ye Xingqing's face gradually paled.

The words Tang Thirty-Six spoke contained Chen Changsheng's swords. They thrust directly at the specialties of Ye Xingqing's techniques and accurately found his weak points.

And now, countless people were listening to these words.

There was no need for too many swords. As long as they were sharp, it was fine. Chen Changsheng's plans were also very simple. As long as they were effective, it was fine.

It wasn't too long before Tang Thirty-Six finished speaking.

The area in front of the Orthodox Academy was still very quiet. It could even be described as a deathly stillness.

After a long time had passed, Su Moyu finally sighed, "I'm inferior to him."

This was a sigh that had come from the depths of his heart.

It was also a view shared by many other people at this time.

"Are you confident now?" Tang Thirty-Six asked.

Su Moyu shot him a strange glance. "I said that I was inferior to Chen Changsheng, but when did I say that I wasn't confident about this match?"

Tang Thirty-Six thought to himself, then why didn't you respond to me just a moment ago?

In truth, even if Su Moyu had said he was confident back then, he would still have found an opportunity to explain the plans Chen Changsheng had prepared last night.

Everyone had always believed that Chen Changsheng had been able to cultivate to his current level at such a young age primarily because of his Orthodoxy backing and those fortuitous encounters of his. As a result, they underestimated his talent in cultivation and his level of diligence.

Tang Thirty-Six thought this was wrong. He believed that Chen Changsheng's genius was worthy of being praised and even revered by all people.

There was one other very important reason: he just didn't like Ye Xingqing, so he wanted to lay bare all the weaknesses and secrets of his techniques.

"Then go and fight," Tang Thirty-Six urged Su Moyu. "Fight until his family's young master can't even recognize him."

He was once a genius of the Li Palace Academy, and now that he had spent half the year in the Mausoleum of Books viewing the monoliths and quietly comprehending the Dao, Su Moyu was currently quite strong. Added onto the fact that he had no mental obstructions preventing him from using Chen Changsheng's plan and that, for some reason, Ye Xingqing put on a much poorer performance than people had imagined, it was unsurprising when this match ended in the favor of Su Moyu.

As for whether Ye Xingqing had been beaten until his young master could no longer recognize him, this was a question only Bie Tianxin could answer. In any case, based on what Su Moyu said, he probably wouldn't be able to.

The third match had also concluded with exceptional speed. Even adding on those conversations that had taken place just before it did not make it too long. The morning light had just receded and the sun was just beginning to exert its heat when Tang Thirty-Six brought Su Moyu and the several dozen new students back into the Orthodox Academy. Only the tightly-shut gate of the Orthodox Academy was left for those spectators anxious for more and those speechless challengers to gawk at.

Tang Thirty-Six's reason was very simple: a friend had returned from the Mausoleum of Books, so they had to hold a banquet and reminisce on old times. As for the trifling matter of the All-School Martial Exhibition, it could be continued after they were done eating.

On the green grass by the lake, many students sat with books in their hands. Not far away, under the shade of a verdant tree, was a pile of Clear Lake Restaurant's famous ice cube roses, which the students could take from whenever they pleased.

Su Moyu couldn't help but sigh at this scene, saying, "This is really too extravagant."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "You've entered the Orthodox Academy

and you won't regret it."

In front of the grass beside the lake was a wall that had clearly been recently erected. This wall was rather short, making it incapable of blocking out the scenery within. Of course, it was even less capable of blocking the sight of that great banyan tree. The wall merely served as a sort of marker.

On the other side of that wall was a forest even denser and even more serene, and devoid of people.

Standing amidst this forest was a small house. Chen Changsheng was waiting for them in front of this house. Upon seeing Su Moyu, he said, "You came?"

"Yeah." Su Moyu noticed his face and commented, "You seem very tired."

Chen Changsheng truly was very tired. He had spent the past few days researching those opponents and searching for their weaknesses, guiding the new students of the Orthodox Academy and giving them plans. In fact, he had constantly been making use of the Intellectual Sword. Moreover, in his rush to re-enter the Garden of Zhou, every night, he made countless attempts. His spiritual sense had been consumed to a severe level and he was on the verge of collapse.

"You can say it now." Tang Thirty-Six looked at Su Moyu and asked, "Why do you want to enter the Orthodox Academy?"

That night when they saw Su Moyu's name on the list, he and Chen Changsheng were simultaneously shocked and concerned.

There really were a few students from the other Ivy Academies that had transferred here, but none of those had been very valued students. Su Moyu was completely different. He had been nurtured and valued for two years by the Li Palace Academy. In the end, when he departed the Mausoleum of Books, he came to the Orthodox Academy without even giving notice to the Li Palace Academy. Once this matter got out, it would definitely incur some trouble.

"I came to avoid trouble." Su Moyu made no attempt to hide his objectives, getting straight to the point. "The storm you guys have stirred up in the capital is too big. I knew of it even though I was in the Mausoleum of Books. If I were to return to the Li Palace Academy and wait for arrangements to be made for me, I would definitely have to represent the Li Palace Academy in challenging you. My only loves are reading and cultivating, not doing these sorts of things."

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six understood.

Daoist Siyuan was one of the Orthodoxy's Six Prefects, the representative of the new faction of the Orthodoxy. Concurrently, he was also the greatest backer of the Li Palace Academy.

That Bie Tianxin, who was already at the middle level of Star Condensation, would insist on challenging the Orthodox Academy despite the discussion it caused was because his parents were on good terms with Daoist Siyuan.

If Su Moyu were to return to the Li Palace Academy, he would definitely be unable to avoid a similar arrangement.

Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat confused. "You don't like fighting, so why did you volunteer just now to represent the Orthodox Academy in a match?"

Su Moyu replied, "Because he was a member of the Bie family."

Tang Thirty-Six added, "It's precisely because he's a member of the Bie family that dealing with him is somewhat troublesome. It's why I've always been rather hesitant."

"To bully the weak and fear the strong is not right," Su Moyu said seriously.

"That's reasonable." The more Tang Thirty-Six saw, the more he felt that Su Moyu was pleasing to the eye. He even felt some admiration.

Su Moyu added, "And like I said to you just now, this match should be for me to fight."

Tang Thirty-Six recalled that he really had said this to him before. At the time, he truly had thought those words were rather strange. Why did he think that the match should be for him to fight?

"Why?"

"Because Bie Tianxin is my cousin."

Chapter 482 - Bie Yanghong's Position

After a moment of silence, Tang Thirty-Six asked, "And Bie Yanghong is your...?"

Su Moyu replied, "[My uncle](#)."

(舅舅 = Mother's brother.)

Tang Thirty-Six took a deep breath, then asked, "Wuqiong Bi?"

Su Moyu wondered to himself, you still need to ask?

"Naturally, she's my aunt."

There was a rather awkward silence.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and said, "In the future, can you mention this a little sooner?"

Su Moyu replied, "No one has ever asked me, and I can't just meet someone and tell them, 'My uncle is Bie Yanghong'."

Chen Changsheng nodded. "That's reasonable."

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at him and said, "I still haven't talked about how you hid that engagement of yours with Xu Yourong from us. Don't be in such a rush to form an alliance."

He then turned back to Su Moyu and said, "Continue."

"When my aunt studied at the Li Palace Academy, she and Archbishop Siyuan were like sister and brother, so she would naturally stand on his side. In addition...she tends to cover for the mistakes of others." As he was speaking of his elders, Su Moyu had a rather unnatural expression. "If Cousin really did fight with you, no matter who won or lost, I'm afraid it wouldn't be that easy to end the matter. It might result in my aunt coming to the capital."

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six looked each other in the eyes, then said with one voice, "It's not necessary! Quickly write to your uncle saying that everything here is all right."

Su Moyu replied, "No need, my uncle already wrote me a letter."

"What?"

"What other reason would I have come out of the Mausoleum of Books for?"

When Su Moyu thought of the contents of that letter, he felt rather helpless. Uncle, even if you're a henpecked husband, does that mean that I'm not afraid of Auntie?

"Uncle wanted me to enter the Orthodox Academy."

"So here I am," he finished.

It was only now that Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six finally understood the entire situation.

Bie Yanghong knew that his own wife supported the Orthodoxy's new faction. At the moment, Bie Tianxin was representing the Li Palace Academy in challenging the Orthodox Academy. If he won, then the Bie family would naturally have offended the Pope, the Wenshui clan, and even Su Li and those two Saints in White Emperor City. But if he lost, that wife of his who loved to cover for the mistakes of others might come to the capital to stir up a storm.

He didn't want such a thing to occur. Perhaps it was because he supported the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, or perhaps it was for the very simple reason that he didn't want to participate in this storm. Consequently, he wrote a letter to Su Moyu in the Mausoleum of Books, asking his most favored nephew to leave the Mausoleum of Books ahead of time, enter the Orthodox Academy, and do his utmost to make this entire matter disappear!

It must be said that Bie Yanghong's way of doing things was very intelligent. When his wife was standing with the new faction of the Orthodoxy, he had Su Moyu represent him in displaying his goodwill, or at least his desire to calm the situation, to the other side. In this way, and with the status and power the two held as a couple, the Bie family would probably be able to avoid any consequences from this storm. This was what was meant by the saying, 'Only by not getting involved can one proudly stride upon the earth'. However, this way of doing things made one fact very obvious: in this matter, Wuqiong Bi had clearly not solicited the

opinion of her husband or had not followed his advice.

The loving couple of the Eight Storms, the legendary companions that truly seemed like immortals, also turned out to have their own disagreements.

Thinking of this, Chen Changsheng couldn't help but sigh.

On the other hand, Tang Thirty-Six was much more straightforward. He asking Su Moyu, "Is the relationship between your uncle and aunt not good?"

Su Moyu looked at him but did not respond, resulting in another awkward silence.

"Just act like I never said that." Tang Thirty-Six chuckled and said, "In this case, you're basically the associate young master of the Bie family. No wonder that guy looked at you with such a strange expression. And if the associate young master wants to discipline a servant, would he dare to hit back?"

Su Moyu very seriously corrected him, "Even if he used his full strength, I would still be able to beat him."

He then turned to Chen Changsheng and sighed, "You truly are extraordinary."

Chen Changsheng felt somewhat embarrassed.

Tang Thirty-Six wasn't embarrassed at all. Draping his arms over Chen Changsheng's shoulders, he said, "The reason your uncle had you enter the Orthodox Academy is now very clear. Today, you've already disciplined your servant. In another few days, if your cousin similarly comes to make trouble, don't you try and avoid it."

Su Moyu thought, the words are the same and the meaning is the same, but why is it that when they come out of your mouth, they're always so grating? He really didn't know how to respond, so he looked around at the serene environment around the house and noted, "This side is actually rather quiet."

"Ordinary students aren't allowed to come over to this side. You also just saw that short wall. Of course, you're definitely no ordinary student. Xuanyuan Po has already readied your room. We'll take you to see it in a moment. So? Our treatment of you isn't bad, right?"

Tang Thirty-Six thought of a coincidence. Laughing, he said, "You're the associate young master of the Bie family and this garden partitioned off by the wall is called the Separate (Bie) Garden. This is destiny, don't you think? That you were meant to transfer to the Orthodox Academy and you were meant to live here?"

Su Moyu wasn't thinking about these things at all. Shaking his head, he replied, "We're all students; to enjoy such privilege is inappropriate."

"He's the principal, I'm the superintendent, Xuanyuan Po is the head of housekeeping, and Zhexiu's position has already been arranged, although we don't know what to call it yet. Princess Luoluo is the lifetime honorary vice principal. In short, none of us is an ordinary student. If you want a position, just mention it."

"But I just feel that we're all youths—why do we need a wall to separate us?"

"Because Chen Changsheng said he likes quiet. In my view, he has too many secrets and is afraid of other people finding them out."

At this, Chen Changsheng could no longer bear to maintain his silence. He explained to Su Moyu, "You know that cultivation really does require quiet. If any of the new students succeed in breaking into Ethereal Opening, they can also move into the Separate Garden. In addition, if any of them can get into the three banners of the Grand Examination, they also have the qualifications to move in. Using Tang Tang's words, it also provides some motivation."

Su Moyu thought that this explanation was rather reasonable. He asked, "How did they all respond?"

In the Li Palace Academy, he had grown accustomed to leading his schoolmates. Today on his first arrival at the Orthodox Academy, he subconsciously began to consider these things.

Tang Thirty-Six turned his gaze to the distant lakeshore, where those young students sat or lay on the grass. "They're all either

students from the counties and the countryside or invisible students of the Ivy Academies that were ignored. If they were to pass the preparatory examination for the Grand Examination, they would offer a sacrifice to the sea of stars and worship the Empress. They wouldn't even dare to have such extravagant hopes as entering the three banners of the Grand Examination. As for breaking into Ethereal Opening...it's something that's even more beyond their imagination. As a result, not a single one of them paid attention to what we said. They just think that we drew a picture of a flatcake for them to look at. There have even been some complaints."

Su Moyu thought of how Chen Changsheng had broken into Ethereal Opening in the middle of the last match of the Grand Examination and shocked the continent, and then he recalled how after that night bathed in starlight in the Mausoleum of Books, breaking into Ethereal Opening seemingly became much more commonplace. He couldn't help inadvertently shooting him a glance and thinking, just how many people actually know the benefits Chen Changsheng has brought to this generation of youth?

Tang Thirty-Six continued to gaze in that direction as he spoke, "In fact, I can understand why they think this way, but I still feel that they aren't very mature. So, a few days ago, I gathered them together and gave them a good scolding."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. He absolutely didn't want to re-experience what happened on that night a few days ago, even if it was only a recollection. He had never in his life seen Tang Thirty-Six curse people like that.

Su Moyu deeply disapproved of this style of teaching. Shaking his head, he chided, "Cursing others is not right."

"Not a single swear came from my mouth. It was just like when you obstructed us on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace."

"Ah, the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace," Su Moyu somewhat remorsefully sighed, flashing an apologetic look at Chen Changsheng.

"I told them, last year at this time, on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace, Chen Changsheng told the entire world that he was going to get first rank on the first banner in the Grand Examination. Moreover, at that time, he hadn't even succeeded at Purification. Everyone thought he was crazy. In the end? In the end, he really did what no one thought was possible."

Tang Thirty-Six finished, "Then how can anything in this world truly be impossible? What do the three banners of the Grand Examination or breaking into Ethereal Opening amount to?"

Su Moyu thought it over, then responded, "It makes sense."

The two brought Su Moyu to his room to let him rest well, then took their leave.

Walking out of the house, Tang Thirty-Six said with almost complete certainty, "His uncle and aunt definitely have problems in their relationship."

Chapter 483 - The Orthodox Academy Walks Into A New Era

"You actually haven't forgotten about it..." Chen Changsheng was quite amazed at this.

"Both members of that couple are part of the Storms of the Eight Directions—who wouldn't be interested in their matters? In fact, I even have some suspicions that when Wuqiong Bi was in the Li Palace Academy, she might have had an affair with Daoist Siyuan. Or else why would she send her own son to help Daoist Siyuan charge through enemy lines? And why would Bie Yanghong be so wary and have Su Moyu come to the Orthodox Academy to offer support?" Tang Thirty-Six began walking towards the lake as he spoke, "But anyhow, that idiot Bie Tianxin is Wuqiong Bi's son, but in no way does it mean that he's Bie Yanghong's son. What do you think, could he be Daoist Siyuan's seed? Sigh. But this is a private matter, so you can't go spreading it around everywhere. Su Moyu especially is not allowed to hear this. After all, this is his own uncle; it must be so embarrassing."

He turned to his side but realized that no one was there.

At some point, Chen Changsheng had taken his leave and had already reached the grass on the other side of the wall.

As he looked over, Tang Thirty-Six asked in confusion, "What are you doing?"

Chen Changsheng didn't even turn his head, waving his hand as

he said, "I'm going to see if the food is done."

The three matches of the early morning had concluded very quickly. Lunchtime came early and there was even time for a small nap afterwards. Only after the sun had moved a little westward and the stuffiness was somewhat dispelled did the Orthodox Academy's gate open once more.

It was Tang Thirty-Six leading the group. The new students of the Orthodox Academy stood behind him on the stone steps, their faces filled with the intermingled emotions of excitement and unease.

Without the slightest surprise, the first student to represent the Orthodox Academy lost. At the moment his opponent's sword seemed ready to fall, Tang Thirty-Six's voice promptly rose up, "We'll end it here."

The second match was a loss, the third match was a loss, and the next few matches of the Orthodox Academy were all very straightforward losses. The normally exceptionally bustling scene was now pervaded with an oppressive atmosphere. Only the voices of Tang Thirty-Six and the new students of the Orthodox Academy could be heard.

"That's about it."

"I said that's about it!"

"I'm speaking so why aren't you listening?"

These words were Tang Thirty-Six's and he was speaking to those people who had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy.

The words of the new students of the Orthodox Academy were much simpler. They basically didn't exceed five words.

"Concede."

"I concede."

"I've conceded."

Only after they returned to the Orthodox Academy's gate, finally casting off the tension and alien feeling they had felt in battle were they finally able to say a little more. Standing on the stone steps, they chatted with their schoolmates.

"Was there anything wrong with the attack I made just now?"

"The principal already said last night, your opponent's weakness is precisely speed, so your attack should have come out a little faster."

"I was already going at my fastest."

"Perhaps that means you haven't practiced the Three Lanes of the Plum Blossom enough."

"The principal said last night that there was a sword style that could hold that person down. What was it?"

"The Three Chants of the Fisherman's Song, an incredibly powerful sword style of the Mount Li Sword Sect. I hear that not even Liang Banhu could grasp it. It's Gou Hanshi's unique skill. With yours or my cultivation, it's simply impossible to learn."

As the Orthodox Academy students discussed with each other, there was no sense of defeat about them. The continuous losses seemed to have no effect on their mood.

That servant of the Bie family had truly spoken correctly. Blades and swords were without eyes, especially in these battles where there was such a vast difference in strength. No matter how sharp Tang Thirty-Six's gaze, how prompt his calls, there were still a few unavoidable accidents. However, those accidents really could not be blamed on those experts challenging the Orthodox Academy. They were all basically the result of the new students of the Orthodox Academy being too nervous.

By dusk, the Orthodox Academy had already lost ten-odd bouts. Six students had suffered injuries, with two of them being rather severely wounded. But none of these students complained, nor did they mention that promise Tang Thirty-Six had made that he would not let them be affected. On the contrary, their hearts were filled with gratitude. Because they understood more than anyone else just how much they, with Chen Changsheng's guidance and

these hard-to-find opportunities to engage in actual combat with experts, just how much they had improved. Just their outlook had been expanded many times from before they had entered the Orthodox Academy.

Today, the matches of the Orthodox Academy that had initiated such a massive storm in the capital and had entertained the populace of the capital finally entered a new stage.

The Orthodox Academy began to lose, but no one believed them to be losers, because those who came forth to represent the Orthodox Academy were all new students they had enrolled a few days ago.

Naturally, there weren't any victors either.

The mood of the students of the Orthodox Academy was very good and Tang Thirty-Six was essentially satisfied with the current situation. However, these half-hearted and routine matches were thoroughly uninteresting to the spectators. They became so bored that they grew agitated and some of them began to doze off and yawn.

The most depressed were those experts of the Tianhai clan and the Ivy Academies. They realized that they had been completely transformed into sparring partners. There were even some experts who truly had slipped their hands and accidentally injured a student. Upon thinking of the threat Tang Thirty-Six had made this morning, they grew uneasy. Only when they saw that Tang Thirty-Six's complexion was normal did they relax, bitterly laughing as they returned.

As the twilight dimmed, the gate of the Orthodox Academy closed. The majority of the Li Palace priests returned to their respective halls, leaving behind a few night guards and one squadron of Orthodoxy cavalry. The common folk of the capital resentfully returned to their homes to prepare dinner. Under the awning, the stewards of the Four Great Markets gazed at the money made from today's bets and tightly creased their foreheads. Those experts that had come to challenge the Orthodox Academy suffered from the most indescribably irritable mood.

After dinner, the students and teachers of the Orthodox Academy began to summarize their experiences. Simultaneously, they also made preparations for tomorrow's matches.

After everything was done, Chen Changsheng and his group returned to the Separate Garden.

Xuanyuan Po had spent all of today with the head chef from Clear Lake Restaurant. In his view, that liveliness of the cooking pot in the kitchen and those ways of handling ingredients that he had never even heard about before were far more important than the liveliness outside the gate. It was only at today's summary that he learned what was going on with the matches taking place outside. Rather puzzled, he asked, "If conceding was all we needed to resolve our problems, why did we need to recruit these new students? We could just concede on our own."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "You've never had a complaint about the Orthodox Academy enrolling new students, so why now?"

Xuanyuan Po replied, "You didn't see, at lunch and dinner, such good dishes were all picked clean by them."

"You see, this is precisely why I wanted to do things this way." Tang Thirty-Six gave him a look and said, "Because you can lose to those people, but I can't."

Xuanyuan Po didn't quite understand. After thinking about it, he realized that this sort of way of speaking was called punning.

"I want to win fifty-eight consecutive victories. I can't just let it end right here," Tang Thirty-Six concluded.

Chen Changsheng shot him a glance, knowing that the reason was definitely not this simple.

Chapter 484 - The Ascetic Priest, The Youthful Master Teacher

In the following few days, the matches in front of the Orthodox Academy continued, and those new students were still the ones that represented the Orthodox Academy.

Those students had all succeeded in Purification, so it was naturally incorrect to say that they didn't have the strength to truss a chicken, but how could they be on par with the experts of the Tianhai clan and the Ivy Academies!

The new students clearly understood what level they were at. In accordance with Chen Changsheng's directions, they stepped into battle and displayed everything they had time to display, experienced everything they wanted to experience, then conceded. It was a little like taking a half-hearted dip, and one could also call it quitting while ahead.

In short, two or three attacks and then a straightforward concession became the most commonly-seen sight in front of the Orthodox Academy.

Until finally, the average experts of the Tianhai clan and the Ivy Academies had all won a round. Only the true experts were left.

The challenger that stepped onto the stage this time was a Star Condensation expert of the Temple Seminary. Originally, he had been in the northwest, cultivating his fleshly body, but then he was summoned back by those two Sacred Hall Archbishops.

This ascetic wore a bamboo hat and, even in the blazing heat of midsummer, still wore thick cotton clothes. His face was cloaked in the shadow of the bamboo hat, and only his eyes emitting a somber air could be seen.

He said emotionlessly to Tang Thirty-Six, "Today, Principal Chen should be personally coming to instruct, yes?"

From the method of address, one would actually be able to tell the true affiliation of these challengers. Those who were nominally under the Ivy Academies but were actually experts of the Tianhai clan would basically always address Chen Changsheng directly by his name. The true experts of the Ivy Academies, even if they had just as poor an impression of Chen Changsheng, would abide by the divine hierarchy of the Orthodox Academy and address him as Principal.

"My deepest apologies. These past few days have been too taxing on Principal Chen's mind. He's presently within the academy studying and resting."

Tang Thirty-Six gazed back at this ascetic whose famous name he had even once heard in Wenshui and smiled, "Priest Bei must have another opponent today."

The ascetic's gaze seemed to pierce through the shadow of the bamboo hat and rest on Tang Thirty-Six's face. He solemnly replied, "I hear that Young Master Tang successively broke through three thresholds in the Mausoleum of Books. If you were

to instruct this one, then this trip will not have been made in vain."

The journey from the distant northwest to the capital was truly a long one.

One could also see from this that Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang, these two Prefects of the Orthodoxy, had truly been preparing to suppress the Orthodox Academy for quite some time.

Tang Thirty-Six felt that this person's gaze was rather searing. Narrowing his eyes, he thought to himself, against a powerful opponent like you, I definitely don't have the confidence to win. Even if I could win, I'll probably suffer terrible injuries.

"Sir's opponent is not me, but him."

He solemnly introduced to the ascetic, "He is the student of the Orthodox Academy in this group with the greatest talent in cultivation."

With a gesture, a young student walked down the stone steps.

That student truly was very young, too young. It was more appropriate to call him a youngster, his appearance not exceeding that of a thirteen-or fourteen-year-old. His expression was nervous and his normally quick-witted eyes were currently rather sluggish.

Seeing this youngster, the ascetic was stunned. "If I do not see

wrongly, this child should barely have succeeded in Purification?"

Tang Thirty-Six praised, "Worthy of the ascetic who comprehends the Dao, Priest Bei! As expected, Sir's penetrating insight is like a torch. Sir did not see wrongly, this child succeeded in Purification three months ago. He came to the capital this time preparing to participate in the Grand Examination's preparatory exam and test his luck."

The area in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate was no longer as bustling as it was a few days ago, but there were still quite a few people. Previously when the renowned Priest Bei personally appeared, the excessively shocked crowd began to buzz with discussion. When they abruptly realized that the opponent the Orthodox Academy had arranged for Priest Bei was this sort of youngster, the place instantly grew extremely quiet. They thought to themselves, is the Orthodox Academy playing some sort of deceitful trick?

"Your meaning is...my opponent is this child?"

Priest Bei's voice rightfully grew angry. With a low voice, he yelled, "This is insulting to me!"

Tang Thirty-Six's expression did not change. Smiling, he replied, "The priest's words are mistaken! The meaning of the All-School Martial Exhibition, besides competing for the future, is also about seniors instructing juniors. This child truly does possess the most talent in cultivation amongst the new students of my Orthodox Academy. Although he's never swapped pointers before and is very nervous, he still chose to bravely step forward and request that his

senior instruct him. How can this be considered an insult?"

A bold and powerful Qi spilled out from under the brim of the hat. Restraining his anger, Priest Bei said, "I ask that you respect me."

Tang Thirty-Six's smile slowly faded as he calmly said, "Priest's two statements sound rather familiar. They're quite similar to those of the officials of the Department for Purging Officials who flaunt themselves as honest and public-minded."

Priest Bei stared into his eyes and harshly yelled back, "You would dare to compare me to those savage officials!"

"I once respected Sir." Tang Thirty-Six paused, then continued to stare at him. "But Sir's return to the capital this time means that I truly can't respect Sir anymore."

Priest Bei's gaze moved between him and that youngster of the Orthodox Academy. "You know full well that I can't attack him."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Because Sir is a gentleman."

Priest Bei asked, "So you chose this child in particular to deal with me?"

Tang Thirty-Six did not deny it, saying, "I will not conceal it from Sir. The vast majority of the names on this list of opponents were set by Chen Changsheng. Only Sir's match was decided by me."

Priest Bei fell silent, and then sighed. "Is the world nowadays really ruled by lowly people?"

Saying this, he turned and prepared to leave.

Tang Thirty-Six had originally planned to say nothing more, but upon seeing the rather melancholy back of this ascetic renowned in the northwest, he couldn't help but open his mouth. "A gentleman can deceive in the pursuit of uprightness. Of course, I'm not saying this is right. Although I'm not a gentleman, I'm not a lowly person either. But as a once-gentleman like Sir is being used by a lowly person for an ungentlemanly matter, I can naturally only use the ways of a lowly person to respond."

Priest Bei seemed to have been struck by a thunderbolt upon hearing these words. His body stiffened, and only after a while was he able to raise his feet once more and walk into the crowd.

As that figure and the bamboo hat atop it proceeded further away, Tang Thirty-Six calmly watched on in silence.

"Put down that this match was our Orthodox Academy's victory."

Not waiting for the surrounding spectators to boo, he calmly declared, "Next."

Not all matches had a story, and not all stories left behind a profound conclusion. The matches before the gates of the

Orthodox Academy continued. With no blood and no shadow of death, there was naturally much less excitement as well. For those ordinary common folk, without these qualities, without any heaven-breaking or mountain-toppling scenes, what difference would there be between the fight of those experts of the continent in the Divine Domain and the fight of those urchins down the street? They merely used a little more strength.

Only the more enlightened people were able to understand the message revealed by these matches.

Those new students that represented the Orthodox Academy in matches, besides Su Moyu with his special circumstances and that youngster, were not able to obtain a single victory, or even the possibility of victory. However, in the extremely brief span of those battles, those students would often display techniques and transformations that were simply unimaginable. Although everyone knew that these students had received Chen Changsheng's direction, that these students were able to realize these instructions revealed a certain possibility.

These children from the counties and the countryside, these weak students disregarded by the Ivy Academies, had suddenly become different.

Besides those common folk that had come to see the fun, the spectators of the matches taking place in front of the Orthodox Academy also included lecturers and students of the Ivy Academies who had changed out of their uniforms. When they saw the students on the steps of the Orthodox Academy, they scarcely dared to believe their eyes. Was that the incomparably stubborn

and mischievous Wei Zhuang that I once taught? Is that really that Chu Wenbin who only knew how to sleep every day!?

When compared to their past selves, the new students of the Orthodox Academy seemed to have a sort of luster about them. Crucially, their mindset was different. They were confident and calm, as if nothing could confound them. They weren't even afraid of the seemingly endless string of losses. They still firmly believed that they would be able to obtain the final success. When all this was put together, they gave form to what was called an easygoing temperament.

Because they were easygoing, they could remain calm and collected, could talk and laugh naturally in front of the crowd. It was absolutely impossible for them to become nervous or inferior because of the jeering and disregard of the crowd.

If it were said that last year when Chen Changsheng became a new student of the Orthodox Academy—followed by Luoluo, Xuanyuan Po, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu—was an indication of new life, then this year's Orthodox Academy could be said to have been reborn, just like these young students—or perhaps it was precisely because they had arrived.

The changes in these new students naturally originated from the Orthodox Academy. The two most pivotal figures were Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six need not be discussed for the moment, but anyone could see Chen Changsheng's importance. If it were not for him relentlessly giving direction and consuming vast amounts of

mental strength every night to research the techniques and weaknesses of those experts, how could those new students possibly have had the nerve to directly confront those experts who were many levels of cultivation above them? How could they possibly possess such self-confidence?

After the Orthodox Academy recruited new students, Chen Changsheng no longer emerged to take part in a match and didn't even come out to take a look at what was going on outside the school's gates. However, all the capital knew that from within the Orthodox Academy, he was always looking outward. Through these several dozen matches, he revealed as much as he liked of his unimaginable innate skill and talent in the path of the sword.

That innate skill in the path of the sword was so powerful, that talent so dazzling, that the entire capital was once more shocked.

From a similar time in last year's summer to now, he had already given the capital and the entire human world far too many shocks. The Ivy Festival, the Grand Examination, the Mausoleum of Books, the Garden of Zhou, Xunyang City...many people had thought that they had almost grown numb to the shocks delivered by Chen Changsheng. No matter what else he did, it would not be enough to catch them by surprise. Yet this time, they were still shocked.

At his age, for Chen Changsheng to possess such an unfathomable cultivation in the path of the sword was nigh-impossible to imagine. What was even more impossible to imagine was that he could instruct others in the sword. It must be known that this wasn't a task as simple as teaching a child to write. To lecture, to teach, to dispel doubts: this was a teacher.

Currently, Chen Changsheng already vaguely possessed the demeanor of a master teacher—because he was too young, whenever this thought came up in the minds of others, they would always shake their heads in denial. But no one dared to deny that if he were given more time, perhaps ten-odd years, and he was to truly mature, perhaps he really would be able to live up to his title as Principal of the Orthodox Academy.

While all eyes were fixed on the Orthodox Academy and praising Chen Changsheng's cultivation in the path of the sword in shock, only one person still dismissed him.

"It's just messing around."

Mo Yu gazed at the Empress's back, boredly fooling around with the ring of grass on her finger. "I also don't know why the people in the court and the Li Palace want to make such a big fuss over nothing."

Chapter 485 - Two Wildflowers Fill The Cliff (I)

Before Qiushan Jun, Mo Yu had been the world's youngest Star Condensation cultivator. It was only natural that she possessed the qualifications to express her disdain and ridicule for those so-called geniuses of cultivation.

The Divine Empress glanced at her and said, "Do you really believe that Chen Changsheng is messing around?"

Mo Yu's fingers slightly stiffened. Similar to many other powerful figures, she had also secretly gone to the gate of the Orthodox Academy. Of course, those matches were not worthy of her eyes, but she was forced to admit that the innate skill and talent Chen Changsheng displayed through the swords in the hands of those new students were not something she could match up to, whether at his age or at present.

This was a question from the Divine Empress—she could not lie. Lightly biting her lip, she answered, "I was talking about Tang Tang."

"Everyone's eyes are on Chen Changsheng, believing Tang Thirty-Six to just be messing around...could it be that you also think this way?"

Although the Divine Empress knew that Mo Yu had just been casually speaking, she was still dissatisfied with her opinion. "Chenwu and those two archbishops prepared for three months,

preparing countless contingency plans, soft and exquisite as silk. No matter how the Li Palace responded, they had the means to make it a bigger affair. But up to today, have you seen the Li Palace express its position once or take a single action?"

Naturally, Mo Yu knew the intention of the Tianhai clan and the two Sacred Hall Archbishops.

Tianhai Chenwu had told Xu Shiji that he just wished to do these things because it was convenient, awaiting Xu Yourong's return to the capital and the one battle to decide it all. Of course, this was not the truth, at least not the entire truth.

When a powerful figure like him joined hands with two Sacred Hall Archbishops to do something, it was impossible for them to be so small-minded.

The Ivy Academies challenging the Orthodox Academy were merely the vanguard of an even greater affair.

Mo Yu had originally believed that the Pope would act to suppress this matter before it exploded, but she had not expected that, even now, the Pope would continue to maintain his silence!

This surprised her greatly.

Now, she had been admonished by the Divine Empress. She now understood. Why had the Li Palace never expressed its stance? Why had the matter of the Orthodox Academy always remained

limited to the confines of the Orthodox Academy? Why had the matter not proceeded as the Tianhai clan and the two Sacred Hall Archbishops had planned, spreading to the Li Palace, thus allowing the All-School Martial Exhibition to become an all-out clash between the new and conservative factions of the Orthodoxy?

It was for one very simple reason.

The Orthodox Academy...had taken care of the matter on its own.

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six simply did not require the Li Palace to express its stance nor the Pope to say anything. They were cleanly and neatly resolving the matter on their own.

Back when the Tianhai clan and the two Sacred Hall Archbishops decided to push this matter, they presumably had not imagined that this matter that was only an interlude in their eyes was about to become a seemingly eternal interlude due to these two youths.

That great event had just begun but already seemed to have ground to a stop.

"As long as the Orthodox Academy can endure, the Pope will not say anything."

The Divine Empress walked to the edge of the platform and looked as the nearby Orthodox Academy gradually began to glow with lantern light. "Countless contingency plans were all broken

by just Tang Tang himself. If the Pope had any view of Chen Changsheng, it was also broken by him. Do you still think he is just messing around?"

Mo Yu was speechless. She truly had not imagined that Tang Thirty-Six, that seemingly frivolous and incompetent guy, was actually able to see through the shrewd and ruthless plans of so many powerful figures.

"Truly, this is the generation of blooming wildflowers."

The Divine Empress said, "Tang Tang is good, Chen Changsheng is even better. If the two of them are given enough time and opportunity, what need is there to worry over the future of the Great Zhou and humanity?"

If a single wildflower were to open up all by its lonesome on a cliff, how could it be described as beautiful?

Only when many wildflowers opened together could it be considered blooming, could it be so beautiful that it touched the soul.

Thinking of all that had changed over the past year, Mo Yu was forced to admit that the reason the Orthodox Academy could so quickly show signs of rebirth, besides Chen Changsheng, was that Tang Thirty-Six had left the Heavenly Dao Academy and entered the Orthodox Academy. If the Empress's judgment was accurate, these methods of Tang Thirty-Six which seemed to be for messing around were actually a cool-headed response. Then one could say

that what the Orthodox Academy required the most at present was precisely a person like him.

She knew of the circumstances behind Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six's first meeting. At the time, Tang Thirty-Six was already renowned as a young genius while Chen Changsheng was a nameless Daoist boy from the countryside. At the entrance examination for the Heavenly Dao Academy, they had met and become acquainted with each other. Moreover, it had been Tang Thirty-Six that had first approached Chen Changsheng. Looking back on it, one would be forced to admit that this sort of meeting truly had a sense of fate about it.

"What is the most extraordinary characteristic of the Wenshui Tang clan? Not their wealth nor their strategies, but their insight."

The Divine Empress gazed at the brightly lit Orthodox Academy and said, "In the past, the Tang Old Master was the first to see how skilled Su Li was. In the proceeding centuries, who dared to show disrespect to the Tang clan? Even the Storms of the Eight Directions did not. Later on, the Tang clan once more went against the pressure of the Imperial Court, allowing Wang Po to work for ten years with them as an accountant, which they were most certainly able to exchange for several more decades of peace. Currently, Tang Tang and Chen Changsheng have such a friendship that if Chen Changsheng really were to become the next Pope, the position of the Wenshui Tangs would become unshakeable."

For some reason, Mo Yu replied, "If this is the case, then Chen Changsheng truly is inferior to Tang Tang."

"Women truly are extroverted." The Divine Empress glanced at her with a profound expression.

Mo Yu felt rather wronged but didn't dare to say anything.

The Divine Empress declared, "The Pavilion of Divination has sent someone over to examine the sword. Since you are already acquainted with Chen Changsheng, accompany him, or else with Chen Changsheng's personality, he really might not be able to examine it."

Unlike last year and unlike the last twenty years, tonight's Orthodox Academy was brightly lit.

Even though it was already very late, the figures of people could still be seen and the sounds of voices heard by the lake, in the forest, and by the fountain.

Chen Changsheng was not used to these changes. Shaking his head, he recalled the matter that had been discussed this morning and turned to Tang Thirty-Six, "The story you gave yesterday wasn't correct. I never said that I would obtain first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination. At the time, Su Moyu was right on the Divine Avenue. He should be able to clearly recall that it was the Archbishop that said it. I don't understand why he would forget such an important thing."

"This means that it's everyone's impression that it was you that said these words, so don't try and explain yourself," Tang Thirty-

Six said, "and I recall very clearly in the Plum Garden Inn, you personally saying it to me."

Because of this statement, the two simultaneously began to think of a situation back then when Chen Changsheng was treating Tang Thirty-Six to a meal. Back then, they had been attempting to communicate in the manner of adults, but now they remembered themselves as presenting a young and inexperienced appearance.

The two looked each other in the eyes and began to laugh.

It seemed that not much time had passed, but many things had already changed.

A year ago, the Orthodox Academy was still desolate and rundown. Although it had been cleaned and repaired by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, besides the region which Chen Changsheng used every day, the other regions were still very bleak. At night, they even seemed like graveyards. A year later, the Orthodox Academy welcomed a group of new students bursting with vitality. The desolate night had been driven away by the lights of the dorms and the library which had once been used by only one person was now filled with many people borrowing the lantern light to read.

Upon seeing these scenes, many people would often think of how Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six were so young but had managed to transform the Orthodox Academy into this appearance and take care of matters with such strength. Inevitably, they were somewhat surprised, but then they were filled with admiration. Chen Changsheng was not thinking about these sorts of things. He

looked at Tang Thirty-Six and asked, "So why do we need to do all this?"

Chapter 486 - Two Wildflowers Fill The Cliff (II)

"I said I was going to drown them, and this is precisely the 'Drowning of Seven Armies'." At some point, the folding fan in Tang Thirty-Six's hand had been exchanged for a green apple. He used the apple to gesture at the lights of library and the silhouettes left by the new students as he said, "The Orthodox Academy now has so many people that it won't be so easy for our opponent to waste us to death. On the contrary, we can waste them to death."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I don't believe you."

After a moment of silence, Tang Thirty-Six replied, "This is the beginning."

"The beginning?" Chen Changsheng was truly confused.

"Your beginning is also the Orthodox Academy's beginning, and this place will always have to get new students..." Tang Thirty-Six looked over the academy in the night and said, "One person's Orthodox Academy sounds very cool, but in reality, that's not the Orthodox Academy. It's just one person. In the future, if it becomes two people, three people, three or four people...none of these is the Orthodox Academy. Only the current academy is the Orthodox Academy."

As the night deepened, the lanterns remained brightly lit. Chen Changsheng followed his gaze and muttered, "But what do we need all these people for?"

"There is strength in numbers," Tang Thirty-Six explained, turning to him. "At the moment, they're still very weak, very young, but in the future?"

"The future huh..." Chen Changsheng had a rough idea. It was just that he really had not considered matters of the future, because he was accustomed to placing his gaze on the time before he reached the age of twenty. But when he looked at the brightly lit Orthodox Academy, at those new students sitting by the window quietly reading their books, at the backs of those young men and women by the lake, he recalled those old scenes that had come to mind when he had just entered the Orthodox Academy, those scenes from several decades ago of those young men and women in this academy studying and gazing at the lake. As he thought of all this, a smile gradually revealed itself on his face. He thought to himself, no matter what happens in the future, this is also rather nice. And doesn't it seem like those trees that had only seen silence for so many years have woken up?

Tang Thirty-Six spoke, "Don't forget, in the future, you will be the Pope."

The entire continent knew that Chen Changsheng would become the Pope in the future. Only he himself was not so sure about it, thinking it far too remote. He had not thought that he was already the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, only several steps away from ascending to the endlessly radiant throne of the Pope. Of course, his true power was far from the likes of Prefects such as Mao Qiuyu and Daoist Siyuan, but purely based off the divine hierarchy, he was already their complete equal. As Archbishop Mei Lisha had said back then, Chen Changsheng only needed to bow to

the Pope. To do so for others was not necessary.

"The Pope...it's not that great."

"Of course it's not that great." Tang Thirty-Six explained, "If His Holiness were not standing behind you, a powerful figure like Daoist Siyuan or Linghai Zhiwang would be able to render you into dust with a single finger! In fact, amongst the reasons they so stubbornly persist in standing by the Tianhai clan, I believe the most important is that His Holiness chose you as his successor. In the future, if you plan to become Pope, it won't be a simple affair."

Chen Changsheng recalled the undercurrent that been running within the Orthodoxy in these past few days and the All-School Martial Exhibition proposal that had clearly been targeted at the Orthodox Academy, and he knew that Tang Thirty-Six's conjecture was correct. Compared to the true powers of the Orthodox Academy like Linghai Zhiwang, he had no foundation in the Orthodoxy other than the Pope's support and the favor Archbishop Mei Lisha had bequeathed upon him. If he wished to become the next Pope, he would inevitably suffer countless complications and challenges in the coming years. How could he respond to them?

"Orthodox Academy is precisely your foundation. In the coming decades, the students and teachers that emerge from the Orthodox Academy will all be regarded as your people, whether they want to or not."

Tang Thirty-Six turned to him and said, "The Tianhai clan and those two archbishops definitely have many contingency plans. There's even a chance that they want to borrow this matter of

challenging the Orthodox Academy to directly revolt against his Holiness. But now, our messing around has confined their efforts to the gate of the Orthodox Academy, so all the pressure will necessarily also be borne by only the Orthodox Academy. You must become used to this fact, because in the coming decades, you could confront similar difficulties at any time."

It was only upon hearing this explanation that Chen Changsheng realized how complex the matter was. Ashamedly, he said, "I really don't understand these things. If this is the case, was it lucky that I didn't go to the Li Palace?"

"Even if you did go the Li Palace and seek the aid of His Holiness, if his elderly self decided that the Orthodox Academy was still able to endure, he wouldn't say anything."

Tang Thirty-Six stared him in the eyes. "Because His Holiness thinks the same as the rest of us. We all hope that you can grow accustomed to this pressure as quickly as possible and then quickly mature."

"All of this...it's too complicated." Chen Changsheng said from the bottom of his heart, "I could never think of all these things. How are you all able to understand this?"

To make painstaking investigations and ascertain the minds of others, these were things that people like the Demon Commander, Black Robe, and Zhou Tong were most skilled at.

Chen Changsheng had always felt that these were the most

difficult matters of the human world, innumerable times more difficult than the Intellectual Sword.

It just so happened that Tang Thirty-Six was also thinking of the sword Su Li had taught Chen Changsheng. "You're even able to learn the Intellectual Sword, so how can you not understand these things? It's just that you're too lazy to think about them."

Chen Changsheng shook his head.

"I'm not comforting you," Tang Thirty-Six said, and stared at him. "The other day, you said that I and Su Li are very similar. In fact, I also remembered that there's a person very similar to you."

"Wang Po?" Chen Changsheng looked back expectantly.

"That guy with his constantly worried look...just where is he similar to you? I'm speaking about His Holiness," Tang Thirty-Six declared.

Chen Changsheng was a little taken aback at these words, not able to see just where he and the Pope were similar.

"When I was small, my grandfather told me that back then, the Orthodoxy's old school had only two successors: the Pope and your teacher. In terms of both cultivation and intelligence, the Pope was inferior to your teacher. Later on, when the two went their separate ways to study at the Heavenly Dao Academy and the Orthodox Academy respectively, the gap between them grew

greater and greater. However, after another ten years, His Holiness caught up. He wasn't like your teacher, who believed in money and power and developed an extremely deep relationship with the Imperial Court. He only studied in the Heavenly Dao Academy, his mind free of distracting thoughts. As a result, his cultivation advanced by leaps and bounds."

Tang Thirty-Six clarified, "I said that you and His Holiness are very similar precisely because the both of you are extremely focused and extremely treasure time."

Chen Changsheng contemplated this, then replied, "It seems that it really is this way."

Because of that shadow, he always lived extremely seriously, cultivating with extreme focus and valuing his time to the extreme. It was just that he had not imagined that the Pope had also been this sort of person.

Tang Thirty-Six stared at him again and said, "In truth, I've always wanted to know, you value your time so much and are always in a rush...just why are you in such a rush? Just what do you need to do?"

Chen Changsheng was silent, saying nothing.

"You don't need to say it. I'm guessing it'll once again sound like some insane declaration like when you said that you wanted to take first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination. Do you want to become the second Zhou Dufu?"

Tang Thirty-Six didn't wait for him to answer. Smiling, he said, "Whatever, but I think it will definitely be very interesting. In the future, I will watch as you succeed in this endeavor."

Chen Changsheng thought it over, but he didn't say the two words of 'thank you'. Instead, he returned a question, "And you? What do you want to do? Why have you become so serious recently...why do you want to help me?"

On many occasions, a question like 'why do you want to help me' could very easily make the mood turn disastrous, but he and Tang Thirty-Six were already too familiar with each other. He didn't care and Tang Thirty-Six was similar.

"Before I entered the capital, I never thought about what I wanted to do in the future." Tang Thirty-Six walked under the great banyan tree and gazed down at the specks of starlight in the lake. After a pause, he continued, "Or perhaps, what I was to do in the future had already been decided, so I didn't need to think about it."

Chen Changsheng stood at his side. Glancing over, he realized that Tang Thirty-Six was abnormally calm.

"When the changes to the Proclamation of Azure Sky were announced, do you remember the Divination Elder's commentary? He said I was lazy, or else I would have long since entered the top ten of the Proclamation of Azure Sky."

"Yes, I remember it very clearly, so that then when I saw you come out of the Mausoleum of Books, I really was caught by surprise."

"Laziness...is because I didn't want to do anything, because I've never been required to do a single thing since I was small."

The wind gradually died down and the surface of the lake regained its smoothness. Those specks of starlight on the water also grew much clearer.

As Tang Thirty-Six gazed at them, he said, "No matter who is the Emperor, no matter who is the Pope, as long as the humans are not enslaved by the demons, my clan can live very well, and I am destined to be the head of the Tang clan. Without needing to do anything, I would live a life of glory, splendor, wealth, and rank. With my powerful authority and high status, I would live in the world's most extravagant manor, marry the most virtuous and quiet wife. I would drink the most expensive wine, ride the fiercest horses, organize the finest theatrical groups, and all those that would come would be the world's most powerful individuals. Since all this was foreordained, what need was there for me to be diligent?"

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then asked, "What about cultivating?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "The Divination Elder said that if I were to work hard, I would be able to enter the Proclamation of Azure Sky's top ten, but...that still wouldn't match up to Xu Yourong, Zhexiu, and also you."

Chen Changsheng recalled that when they met at Plum Garden Inn, he had mentioned this matter.

At the time, Tang Thirty-Six had called them 'that woman who makes one speechless and that wolf cub'.

He looked at Tang Thirty-Six and pointed out, "To be able to enter the top ten of the Proclamation of Azure Sky is already quite excellent."

"It truly is excellent, but it's still a bit less than you freaks. Even if it's lacking by just a point, it's still lacking." Tang Thirty-Six paused, then continued, "Since I can't be the very best, what's the point?"

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to respond to this, so he changed the subject, "Then why are you no longer lazy?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "The Divination Elder's commentary on the Proclamation of Azure Sky said it was because I met a lucky chance."

"What lucky chance? How come I don't know of it?"

"Idiot, aren't these words precisely speaking about me meeting you?"

"What about me?" Chen Changsheng truly did not recognize anything extraordinary about himself.

And just like Tang Thirty-Six had said a few days ago, a person unaware of their own genius was truly something that made people in the same field both angry and depressed.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and shook his head, saying, "I've never met a person like you. The people like you in the world are probably even rarer than pure white Unicorns, because you live... too seriously, too properly. I still don't know what you're chasing after, but that sort of feeling...is very interesting."

Chapter 487 - Two Wildflowers Fill The Cliff (III)

Since Chen Changsheng arrived at the capital from Xining Village, the most important event he had experienced was not when he went to the Divine General of the East's estate to end the engagement, nor was it when he met Luoluo at her time of need in the Orthodox Academy, and it wasn't even when he met the Black Dragon in the depths of the Tong Palace. Although, at a certain level, those two meetings had changed his fate, what had truly brought about a change in his life was that meal in the Plum Garden Inn.

It was only upon meeting Tang Thirty-Six that he understood that the young should be frivolous and not like himself and Senior Yu Ren, clearly very young yet living like elders of many years with pure hearts and few desires. It was only upon meeting Tang Thirty-Six that he understood there were some matters in the world that should be fought for, and also some things that should be abandoned if they needed to be abandoned. In other words, he learned from Tang Thirty-Six how to live life a little less seriously.

Correspondingly, after coming from Wenshui to the capital, the most important event Tang Thirty-Six experienced was also meeting Chen Changsheng. From Chen Changsheng, he learned even more than Chen Changsheng learned from him.

Their temperaments agreed with each other. That didn't mean they were completely alike. In fact, they were precisely the opposite of each other. One was active, the other quiet. One was like water, the other like fire. When put together, they mutually

matched with each other and were truly able to display a power far beyond their ages.

Even more importantly, if Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six had not met, then the Ivy Festival might not have developed the way it did, the final result of the Grand Examination might have been very different, and the Orthodox Academy absolutely would not have reopened its doors and recruited new students. Chen Changsheng would have been unable to cope with the pressure applied by the Tianhai clan and the Orthodoxy's new faction, and the entire story would have walked a completely different path.

One could even say that history itself would also change.

From a certain perspective, it was still Chen Changsheng, the young Daoist boy from the countryside, and Tang Thirty-Six, who was in the capital for the first time, meeting in the Heavenly Dao Academy that time that was truly important beyond measure!

"Perhaps you did it deliberately, perhaps you did it intentionally."

Regardless, it wasn't uninteresting.

Tang Thirty-Six stared into his eyes and continued, "You've never thought that I and Princess Luoluo are similar. In fact, I also bear a very heavy responsibility."

Chen Changsheng believed that Luoluo already bore the heavy

responsibility of the Demi-human race, so she shouldn't bear the pressure of the conflict between two powerful forces of the human world. As a result, he didn't let her return to the Orthodox Academy and even deliberately decreased the number of times they met. However, he had not thought about the fact that Tang Thirty-Six was the heir of the Wenshui clan. The many things he had done in the capital, in the eyes of some observant people, perhaps could be taken as the will of the Old Master of the Tang clan.

Upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's words, he suddenly understood. He was instantly filled with regret and wanted to say something.

Tang Thirty-Six raised his right hand, indicating that he shouldn't speak so much nonsense. "But it doesn't matter. I'm not an adult yet, so I can temporarily ignore these things."

"A moment ago, you asked just what I wanted to do, why I wanted to help you? You're incorrect. I'm not helping you, I'm helping myself. After all, I'm also a student of the Orthodox Academy, and this place isn't the sole property of you, Chen Changsheng. What do I want to do? What I want is to be able, before I return to Wenshui and inherit the family business, to not think about the problem of the livelihood of several hundred thousand people, to not think about the problem of the continuation of my clan for another thousand generations. I don't want to write about any of those problems. For myself, for us, I want to wantonly and joyfully play around!"

Tang Thirty-Six continued to gaze at Chen Changsheng as he spoke, "A few days ago, I said to you here, young people should live

like young people. If you should laugh, laugh! If you should curse, curse! If you should...why isn't Xuanyuan Po hitting trees today? Are the appetizers of Clear Lake Restaurant so tasty? In any case, in the future when you become the world's most powerful person, when people bring up me, besides my identity as head of the Tang clan, they'll also talk about how, several centuries ago, you and I allowed the Orthodox Academy to stand up once more. That thought fills me with joy."

His fate was predetermined to be the head of the Wenshui Tang clan, the wealthiest man on the continent. This did not require struggle, did not require effort. So he cared even more about the future of the Orthodox Academy, because it was not some gift left behind by his ancestors, but a project they had worked on with their own hands.

All youths enjoyed speaking of struggle, but not all youths understood this reasoning.

"I know how to work hard."

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then said, "For certain reasons, I was originally planning to work hard until I became the most powerful person in the world. This matter is something I can do incidentally."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "You've used the word 'incidentally' very well. I find it very admirable. It seems indifferent and particularly uncaring. In the future, when you become the world's most powerful man, don't forget this word."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I will remember."

Tang Thirty-Six extended his hand. "Deal."

Chen Changsheng had never performed this sort of action before. He somewhat clumsily imitated Tang Thirty-Six in extending his hand.

Tang Thirty-Six very casually gripped the hand and then released it.

"Let's go. The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education sent news saying that the Orthodox Academy will have guests tomorrow. We have to prepare a little."

"You're the principal, this sort of thing is meant for you to do. I'm too lazy to care about it. Let me stick around for a little more."

Tang Thirty-Six walked over to the great banyan tree by the lake. "In the past, you and Princess Luoluo always hogged this tree. Today, you have to let me enjoy it a little."

Without saying anything, Chen Changsheng turned and left. After a moment, he heard a voice coming from the great banyan tree. Turning his head, he saw that Tang Thirty-Six was already standing on the tree branch.

The light of stars spilled down from the night sky, enveloping the great banyan tree and plating his clothes with a faint layer of the radiance of the stars. From a distance, he seemed like a very beautiful little silver man.

The plot of the Tianhai clan and the Orthodoxy's new faction had encountered an unforeseen setback.

No one was able to tell whether this was a plot or a farce.

Under Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six's seemingly mischievous, but truthfully quite tough and unyielding resistance, this offense which used the All-School Martial Exhibition as its origin had been forced to temporarily come to a stop before it was able to transform into a fierce storm. After Su Moyu disciplined that servant of the Bie family called Ye Xingqing, Bie Tianxin most likely realized that this was a warning from his father. Even after the last match concluded, he still did not appear.

The Orthodox Academy welcomed a momentary peace, and then it very quickly welcomed its first group of guests.

In the early morning, when the weather was still not too hot, the Orthodox Academy's main gate completely opened, with the priests of the Li Palace arrayed outside. The new students who had just concluded their breakfast or had already begun their morning studies curiously looked over. News began to spread and the new students revealed tense and excited expressions on their faces. One by one, they made their way over to the main gate, curiously peering out. It didn't take long before two carriages stopped in front of the gate. The Imperial Guards that had opened the way

handed off their duties to the Orthodoxy cavalry. Palace maids walked before the two carriages and solemnly and respectfully supported the passengers off the carriages.

The visitors of the Orthodox Academy were Mo Yu and an old man.

Chapter 488 - Viewing The Sword

Upon seeing that it really was Lady Mo Yu that had come, the students of the Orthodox Academy became extremely nervous and excited. Those in the back kept standing on tiptoe to get a better view of this legendary individual. As for those youths at the very front of the crowd, they were so stunned by her absolute beauty that they didn't even dare to lift their heads, and could only work up the nerve to gaze at her feet!

In truth, the students clearly understood that the relationship between the Pope and the Divine Empress was no longer so incredibly close as it had been in the past and that the Orthodox Academy was precisely the frontline where these two powerful forces clashed. But they still found it hard to suppress their excitement. After all, Mo Yu was the most famed beauty of the Great Zhou and also its most famed accomplished woman. Moreover, she was also a powerful personage of extraordinary authority and influence. Her status was such that even the Princess of Ping had a lesser status than her in the hearts of the masses. Only Xu Yourong, who had gone off many years ago to Holy Maiden Peak to cultivate the Dao, could be discussed on equal terms with her.

As for the old man that followed Mo Yu into the Orthodox Academy, his clothes bore the emblem of the Pavilion of Divination. Presumably, he was a steward or guardian of the Pavilion of Divination.

But why would a person of the Pavilion of Divination come to the Orthodox Academy? Why would Lady Mo Yu accompany him?

The questions in the minds of these students would fail to find an answer, because Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six swiftly arrived on the scene.

Last night, Tang Thirty-Six had gone to sleep a little late, thinking that, after great difficulty, the matches had finally reached a break and he could use the cool and refreshing early morning to get a good sleep. Who would have thought he'd have to wake up for this? His mood was already rather sour, but when he saw those students staring at Mo Yu with such captivated looks, he found the scene particularly shameful. He angrily shouted, "What are you all looking at? Have you never seen a pretty girl before?"

Although beauty could amuse the eyes, it could not replace the rules of the academy, and the rules of the Orthodox Academy were currently whatever Tang Thirty-Six said. The students shook their heads and begrudgingly scattered. It was just that the speed at which they left was so slow that it made one's blood boil in anger.

Chen Changsheng knew Mo Yu's nature was truthfully not at all as indifferent and quiet as she presented to him. The Grand Lady Mo who could manage the imperial government in place of the Divine Empress had always been widely regarded as cold and unyielding. Tang Thirty-Six's words were very casual and Chen Changsheng was very concerned that Mo Yu might be displeased and use this opportunity to raise some difficult questions. Turning over to her, he found unexpectedly that Mo Yu didn't feel this act to be disobedient at all and was faintly smiling.

"I thought you would be angry," he whispered to Mo Yu as he

glanced over that old man from the Pavilion of Divination.

Mo Yu rolled her eyes at him and said, "Is there something to be angry about, being called a pretty girl? On normal days, you never call me that."

Her voice was very soft, and it could be believed that Tang Thirty-Six and even that old man from the Pavilion of Divination were unable to hear their chat.

Since they were nominally here representing the Imperial Court to inspect the Orthodox Academy, they had to inspect. Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six accompanied them as she casually strolled through the grounds and casually spoke.

"Does your second elder sister still love foil jigsaw puzzles?" Mo Yu asked Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Last year when I took my leave, she already wasn't playing it much. Now she likes to build wooden houses...about this big."

His hands gestured. "That house doesn't look very big, but if you want it to be steady, it needs a table specially made for it. In the end, to fit that table in, the clan had to build a house especially for her."

Mo Yu smiled, "Then that's also a part of your home."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "If my home could be half the size of the Imperial Palace, none of this trouble would be necessary."

Mo Yu chuckled, "It's not like I haven't been to Wenshui before. If we take your grandfather's residence and those manors by the river and add them all together, half the Imperial Palace...no, even the entire Imperial Palace isn't that big."

There were no sharp words contained in this chat, or at least Chen Changsheng couldn't hear any. He was currently in a state of shock. At the Ivy Festival, he didn't see Mo Yu and Tang Thirty-Six communicate with each other. It was only today that he realized that they were actually old friends. This was what was meant by the saying, 'Power and wealth are truly difficult to separate'.

"When we were small, I became friends with him and his second elder sister."

Mo Yu guessed at what he was thinking and smiled, "But the last time I went to Wenshui with the Empress, he was only three, just like a mud-covered monkey. Who could have expected that he would grow so much?"

Even Chen Changsheng, who was rather slow in this aspect, was able to understand the meaning behind these words.

Tang Thirty-Six was naturally able to understand, but this meant he had to act even more like he didn't understand.

Mo Yu was no spoiled princeling like Bie Tianxin. She was Grand Lady Mo, and the Divine Empress behind her was far more terrifying than Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi added together!

An heir of an aristocratic family like Tang Thirty-Six naturally knew when the time was appropriate to be wanton and when it was time to be low-key.

Chen Changsheng was not very used to Tang Thirty-Six's expression. This was because, up to now, he still had no idea what Mo Yu's position in the Zhou Dynasty was.

Of course, he couldn't be blamed for this. It could only be said that the Mo Yu that had been presented before him was too unlike Mo Yu.

They arrived at the lakeside of the Separate Garden. It was very beautiful and quiet here, the wall cutting them off from the burning gazes of the distant young students.

Only now did Mo Yu finally formally introduce, "This man is one of the head managers of the Pavilion of Divination."

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six gave the bow of the junior generation towards this manager.

One was the successor of the Orthodox Academy and one was the successor of the Wenshui Tang clan, but they were both young. Crucially, this man was a manager of the Pavilion of Divination,

not some ordinary place's manager. They didn't dare disregard the Pavilion of Divination. Besides, Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six had an exceptionally good impression of the Pavilion of Divination and the Divination Elder. The commentary and expectations the Divination Elder had announced at the changing of ranks for the Proclamation of Azure Sky for the students of the Orthodox Academy had not been forgotten by them.

That head manager also did not dare to slight them, solemnly returning their greetings. He turned to Tang Thirty-Six and smiled, "Recently, we've cooperated very happily with Young Master Tang. I hope that we can continue to work together."

This was naturally speaking of the two sides working together to win money from the Ivy Academies challenging the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six modestly replied, "You flatter me, it's primarily because of Chen Changsheng's excellent coordination."

The manager roared with laughter, then turned to Chen Changsheng, "Principal Chen's four swords have engaged the guardians in enthusiastic discussion for several days. All of them say that Principal's cultivation of the path of the sword is truly unfathomable."

In the end, Chen Changsheng was not a businessman. His face was not as thick as Tang Thirty-Six and that manager's, so he was rather embarrassed by these words.

Mo Yu glanced at him. She didn't say anything, but he could see that her gaze was rich with mockery.

The reason for this manager's visit had been clearly explained in the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education's message that had been sent on behalf of the palace. As a result, Xuanyuan Po had the students leave the library in advance, leaving the place empty.

Chen Changsheng removed his dagger from his waist and offered it up with both hands to the head manager.

The head manager took the sword, but he was in no rush to extract it from its sheath.

His gaze rested on the surface of the sheath, remaining fixated on it for a very long time.

Chen Changsheng's mood instantly grew nervous.

Although his master and the Pope had both said that no one could forcefully open this sheath, when he thought of all the things within the sheath—the several thousand famous swords, those treasures which he had kept stored all this time and had not even told Tang Thirty-Six of, and most importantly of all, the illusory black monolith—he couldn't help but be nervous.

Chapter 489 - Ranking The Sword

After a very long time had passed, or so it seemed to Chen Changsheng at any rate, that head manager from the Pavilion of Divination finally shifted his gaze away from the sheath, turning to him and chuckling.

Chen Changsheng did not know if there was some deeper meaning behind this laugh, but he could only hope that there was not.

The manager's hand caressed the sheath, sighing, "Ah, an excellent object."

Tang Thirty-Six naturally knew that this sheath was an excellent object.

Any sort of spatial artifact would be able to become the most precious treasure of an ordinary sect or school.

This sheath of Chen Changsheng's had once poured out a mountain of swords in the library, and that might not have even been everything inside it. From this, one could speculate as to how massive the space within was.

In the continent, whether it was for comparing cultivators against each other or evaluating whether magical artifacts were good or bad, the Pavilion of Divination was assuredly the best choice, or else those famous Proclamations would not have such great credibility. Tang Thirty-Six knew that this head manager had

come to see the Stainless Sword, but he also didn't want to pass on the opportunity to have the sheath evaluated as well. He probed, "How excellent is it?"

The head manager solemnly declared, "Extremely excellent."

Chen Changsheng almost broke into a laugh at these words, his nervousness somewhat relieved. Tang Thirty-Six was rather depressed, thinking to himself, this head manager's level of shamelessness when speaking is really equal to mine. He said irritatedly, "Is it excellent enough to be listed on the Tier of Legendary Weapons?"

These words were just something he had said in anger, but to his surprise, that head manager put on a solemn expression as he carefully considered the question before finally shaking his head.

Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat satisfied and also somewhat disappointed.

But it was at this moment when the head manager spoke, "I remember that this sheath has always been on the Tier of Legendary Weapons. It naturally doesn't need to be listed in it again."

The library was exceptionally quiet.

Tang Thirty-Six glanced at Chen Changsheng, Mo Yu glanced at the sheath, and Chen Changsheng didn't know where he should be

glancing.

"This is the Vault Sheath." The manager lightly rapped against the sheath, listening to the heavy yet unmuffled noise. He sighed, "It has also been twenty-some years since I last saw it."

Although Mo Yu had her conjectures on this matter, her expression still flickered. She asked, "This is the Vault Sheath that was once kept in the Li Palace?"

The head manager did not immediately answer her question. Instead, with a solemn expression, he pulled the dagger out of the sheath.

Staring at the dagger, he slowly spoke, "If it were not the Vault Sheath, how could it hold such an incomparably sharp double-edged sword?"

The evaluation of 'incomparably sharp' was often heard, but when this evaluation came from the Pavilion of Divination famed for its rigor, it gained an incredibly extraordinary and distinct flavor.

This evaluation indicated that the sharpness of Chen Changsheng's dagger was truly unrivaled. The Pavilion of Divination believed that solely on the sharpness of this dagger, there was no divine weapon in the world that could exceed it.

This dagger had a very unremarkable appearance. Chen

Changsheng had never paid much attention maintaining it, barely even wiping it a few times. However, it was plain to see that there were no stains upon the body of the dagger, not even a speck of dust. In Chen Changsheng's hands, this sword had killed no small number of people, soaked in no small amount of blood, yet no blood could be seen.

"The sword is called Stainless, and it truly is stainless," the manager sighed.

This dagger was far too sharp, so its surface was incomparably smooth. It could pass through innumerable flowers and not carry away the slightest fragrance, enter the mortal world and not stir its red dust, pierce through all things and yet not disturb them!

Mo Yu looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "What is this sword made of?"

In order to make a sword so sharp, it didn't just require an incredibly high level of forging. Most importantly, the sharpness of a sword depended on what it was made of.

Only the densest and toughest, and simultaneously the most flexible of materials, unafraid of both high and low temperatures, could bear such thorough tempering.

Chen Changsheng shook his head. He truly did not know what this dagger was made of. Then he, Mo Yu, and Tang Thirty-Six all turned to that head manager.

The head manager shook his head, saying in a chilly voice, "This matter cannot be spoken, or else the thunder above the nine heavens will crash, and the fates of both the one who spoke of it and the one who wields the sword will encounter a terrible danger."

What Tang Thirty-Six loathed the most was this way of using profound mystery to lord over others. He thought to himself, the Pavilion of Divination just loves to act as gods and play as devils.

After viewing the sword, the head manager left before Mo Yu, saying that it was in order to prepare, after so many years, to change the rankings of the Tier of Legendary Weapons.

Mo Yu did not leave. She looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "The Vault Sheath is the treasure of the Li Palace. Back then, your master stole it away. Why are you just carrying it with you? It seems somewhat inappropriate."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, before today, only His Holiness saw through the origins of this sheath. As long as you don't spread it around, just who would think it inappropriate?

"Firstly, my master was once Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the senior brother of His Holiness, and also a successor to the old school of the Orthodoxy. Even if it was just splitting up family property, he would still have the qualifications to take some things from the Li Palace."

He continued, "Secondly, if you think it inappropriate, I can go

today to the Li Palace and return it to His Holiness and then request that he bestow it back to me, but...don't you think all those actions are unnecessary?"

Mo Yu seemed as if she was gazing at a stranger. Arching her brows, she said, "Today, your words are much sharper than your incomparably sharp sword...this isn't at all like your regular self."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Perhaps it's because I've been honing the sword more recently."

Mo Yu knew that he was speaking of those things that had been occurring in front of the Orthodox Academy recently. After examining him for a while, she declared, "Not bad, you truly are much stronger than you were a while ago."

Given his successive battles with initial level Star Condensation experts and then his guiding of the new students in fighting opponents who were far above them in strength, Chen Changsheng had spoken correctly. This process had been too arduous. It was like using countless big stones and small stones, round stones and square stones, to hone his own sword. As long as this sword did not snap, it would inevitably become ever sharper.

From the Mausoleum of Books to the Garden of Zhou, from Xunyang City to the capital, all the good fortune he had encountered and all the things he had comprehended were being incessantly hammered and burned in this process. All the impurities were being squeezed out or heated into smoke to vanish without a trace. Only the purest portion was left behind, ultimately becoming his own strength and cultivation, never to be

lost.

Chen Changsheng truly had gotten much stronger. If he were to battle again with Divine General Xue He or Liang Hongzhuang, he would be almost certain to win.

"But all of this has no meaning."

Mo Yu calmly smiled at him, "Because she is about to return."

"Everyone is telling me that she is about to return."

Chen Changsheng seriously replied, "But in truth, I believe that this also has no meaning."

Mo Yu replied, "You are the future Pope and she has become the Holy Maiden. If you lose at her hand, what sort of voice do you think you will hear from within the Orthodoxy?"

This matter involved the competition between the northern and southern factions of the Orthodoxy that had persisted for a thousand years. Although the fact that Xu Yourong had been born in the capital meant that the conflict between the two sides had been less intense, Chen Changsheng knew that Mo Yu's words had not been exaggerated. After a long silence, he asked with complex emotions, "Do we have to fight?"

Chapter 490 - One Mountain To Examine One Person

Mo Yu said indifferently, "In the end, it all depends on your own decision. If you're asking for my opinion, you winning over her is best. Anyhow, I find her unpleasant to the eye."

Chen Changsheng was rather puzzled. "I remember you saying that you were very good friends with her."

"Between friends is when it's easiest to find each other unpleasant."

Mo Yu turned and walked out of the library.

While Chen Changsheng and Mo Yu were speaking, Tang Thirty-Six had kept his silence. Only after her figure had disappeared from the library did he walk up to Chen Changsheng and stare him in the eyes without saying anything.

"You're also rather scary this way," Chen Changsheng commented.

Tang Thirty-Six continued to stare into his eyes. "Everyone says that the eyes are the window into the soul. I really want to see just how much more you're hiding from us."

"What did I hide from you?"

"How did I not know that you were so familiar with Grand Lady Mo?"

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to explain.

The two belonged to different factions but were privately in touch...but this was a minor concern. The most important was that the reason he and Mo Yu knew each other was impossible to speak about. No matter how lofty Mo Yu's status, she was still a beautiful woman and her reputation was important. He couldn't just tell the entire world that the fairy-like Lady Mo Yu would climb onto his bed and sleep whenever she wasn't busy...

"Chen Changsheng, you're pretty good." Tang Thirty-Six sighed, "Your sheath is the divine artifact of the Li Palace, the Vault Sheath, your sword will also become one of the famous objects on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, your fiancée is Xu Yourong, you have a female student in Luoluo, and now you even have some sort of fuzzy relationship with the Grand Lady Mo beloved by all men of the Great Zhou..."

Chen Changsheng seriously said, "I have to clear this up, I haven't even touched her hand before."

Tang Thirty-Six's expression showed that he clearly didn't believe this, but in the next moment, he became very stern. He said gravely to him, "Keep your distance from her."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning and nodded his head.

Tang Thirty-Six advised, "Remember my words, this woman isn't simple and her temperament is merciless. Even if you're doing business, you shouldn't choose her."

Chen Changsheng recalled the Mo Yu that had imprisoned him in the Tong Palace and nodded his head once more.

And then he thought of the Black Dragon in the depths of the Tong Palace, how he had been too busy recently and that it had already been quite a few days since he had last been to New North Bridge.

"Tonight, there's something I have to go out for," he said to Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered at him, "See, this is yet another secret."

Chen Changsheng laughed but said nothing more.

Shoulder to shoulder, the pair walked out of the library, when suddenly Tang Thirty-Six said, "In the future, I won't blame you for that matter anymore."

Confused, Chen Changsheng looked at him and asked, "What matter?"

"Last year in the inn, I wanted to hold your sword, but you didn't

let me. This matter always made me very unhappy...now that I think about it, I had only just got to know you back then. It makes sense for you to be a little cautious."

That head manager from the Pavilion of Divination had just ascertained the worth of Chen Changsheng's sword. Tang Thirty-Six thought to himself, if it were me, I would also treat this sword as a precious treasure and not easily show it to others.

Chen Changsheng was dazed for a few moments before finally recalling that old matter. Shaking his head, he said, "You were holding a bit too much of a grudge."

Tang Thirty-Six perked his straight eyebrows as he said, "Did you know that the stars the demons can see where they live are much less than what we can see?"

This fact was recorded in the Daoist Canon. Moreover, it wasn't too long ago that Chen Changsheng had returned from the snowy plains, so he was very aware of this fact and nodded his head.

"At night, our sky is covered all over with stars, but it's different over there. There are some places where the stars are densely packed and others where they're very sparse. The stars close to each other form a picture."

"I know. Nanke's Southern Cross Sword was realized from the two of rivers of stars in their night sky."

"The river of stars is very broad and vast. What we're going to talk about is something within the river of stars."

"What thing?"

"The demons will take differently shaped combinations of stars and call them constellations. Those born at different times of the year will belong to different constellations and possess their own special characteristics."

"And then?"

"If I were born on the demons' side, then based on my date of birth, I should be under the Heavenly Scorpion Constellation."

Chen Changsheng halted his steps. He recalled that the Daoist Scriptures really did record this sort of information, but he didn't understand why Tang Thirty-Six had so suddenly brought it up. It must be known that the demons and humans had always had different cultural contexts. Moreover, in their own territories, the idols and objects of veneration of one side would become taboos of the other side.

"Right, that head manager of the Pavilion of Divination..." He paused in confusion because he realized that he couldn't quite remember what that head manager looked like.

The sword had been viewed just a few moments ago and his memory had always been good. How could he forget the

appearance of a person he had just met?

Tang Thirty-Six didn't hear any further questions about constellations and was feeling somewhat frustrated, but upon hearing Chen Changsheng's words, he also couldn't help but be stunned.

He realized that he had also forgotten the appearance of that head manager. It was so bad that as time passed, the memory of that period of time was becoming fainter and fainter!

Not everything about that period was becoming faint, only matters concerning that head manager. He even had a feeling that when they were viewing the sword in the library, only he, Chen Changsheng and Mo Yu had been in the library.

He and Chen Changsheng looked each other in the eyes, each able to see the unease and fear in the other's eyes.

Was a head manager of the Pavilion of Divination this powerful?

Just who was that head manager?

Just...who was he?

Upon leaving the Orthodox Academy, the head manager did not wait for Mo Yu but headed straight for the Imperial Palace.

The one who greeted him at the gate was that elderly chief eunuch.

That chief eunuch's face carried a faint arrogance. Whether it was the chief imperial bodyguard or other palace eunuchs bowing to him, he would only let out a 'hmpf' from his nose. He would naturally not speak to this head manager.

No one noticed that in the depths of the palace when no one was around, the cold pride on that chief eunuch's face utterly vanished. As he whispered to that head manager, his bearing even seemed rather humble.

In this continent, there were not more than ten people who could make this chief eunuch act so humbly.

In the secular world, a head manager of the Pavilion of Divination was naturally an important personage, but he would definitely not rank within these ten people.

So the truth was very simple: this old man was not a head manager of the Pavilion of Divination.

Although he truly did come from the Pavilion of Divination.

In a desolate palace hall, the Divine Empress met with this old man.

Even she acted very respectfully towards this old man. She

invited him to sit first and then sat down.

At this point, the old man's identity was on the verge of being disclosed.

This conversation of theirs concluded very quickly because the Divine Empress and this old man from the Pavilion of Divination only spoke three sentences in total.

Two of these sentences were spoken by the old man.

"His surname is Chen."

"I cannot make out how old he is."

Upon hearing these two sentences, the Divine Empress fell silent for a very long time. She then calmly said to the old man, "It's been difficult. The scenery at Mount Feiya is not bad. In the future, if I have the chance, I will pay a visit."

The old man nodded his head, then stood up and left the Imperial Palace.

At this time, the hot tea on the table had just been served and steam still rose up from the cups.

The Divine Empress gazed at the steam above the teacup. She was in a quiet trance, thinking about something.

Mount Feiya was a famous mountain on the coast of the Western Sea. It encompassed an area several hundred li in circumference. Its scenery was quiet and beautiful. It was said that when the weather was at its best, one could stand at its highest point and be able to faintly make out the Horn of the White Deer of the Great Western Continent.

This famed mountain had once belonged to the south and it had also been occupied by the Great Western Continent. In the past two centuries, it was actually the territory of the Great Zhou, but this fact had not obtained the recognition of all powers. As a result, Mount Feiya was nominally ownerless.

The Divine Empress had said that if she had the opportunity, she would go to Mount Feiya to visit. Her meaning was that from this day forward, the Great Zhou was no longer Mount Feiya's owner.

Today, Mount Feiya changed owners.

This famed mountain by the sea was the price she had paid to invite this old man to the capital.

For this, the old man needed only a glance.

Of course, he wasn't looking at the sword, but at a person.

Even if the Stainless Sword was a divine weapon to be recorded in the Tier of Legendary Weapons, how could it be worth the price

of Mount Feiya?

What was truly worth this price was Chen Changsheng.

The Divine Empress gazed in silence at the gradually dispersing steam, thinking of those two sentences the old man had left behind.

Chen Changsheng was definitely surnamed Chen.

The old man said his surname was Chen, his meaning being that he was of the Chen Imperial clan.

Many people knew that Chen Changsheng was sixteen this year.

The old man said that he couldn't make out how old he was, indicating that he could possibly be less than sixteen or even older.

The Divine Empress stood up and walked out of the hall.

With a sweep of her sleeve, the steam coming from the tea instantly vanished. The tea in the cup had become ice.

Walking out of the hall, she clasped her hands behind her and gazed somewhat proudly at the small pool before her.

But it was a mystery what she was thinking about.

The water in the pool was very green and very calm. As the night breeze swept across it, countless patterns appeared on its surface.

She stood by the pool for a very long time, from morning to twilight and then on to the descent of darkness.

The pool suddenly began to bubble as if something was about to emerge from below.

Chapter 491 - The Clear And Intense Cry Of The Dragon

Night at New North Bridge was similar to the summer nights of other places in the capital, brimming with the stifling heat of summer. The grass was littered with people endlessly fanning themselves with palm-leaf fans. Many people used the hand not holding the fan to carry a bag of ice. Chen Changsheng waited for a very long time until an ideal chance came for him to go from the tree to the well and jump in.

It was still that familiar feeling of falling, that icy chill that bored into the bones. None of the torrid summer heat above could be found in this underground space. The thick mantle of snow on the ground signified that this place would always be the cruel winter.

As he watched the Black Dragon slowly float over like a moving mountain range, although he had seen this sight many times before, he still found it impossible to control his emotions, feeling almost scared witless.

The Black Dragon floated in the space in front, gazing at him from high up. The emotion revealed in its dragon eyes was one of cold indifference. Only he could clearly tell that the deepest depths of those eyes concealed a hint of impatience and complaint.

After returning to the capital from Xunyang City, he had only come to see the Black Dragon once. It was just that pressure placed on the Orthodox Academy recently had been far too great and he had been far too busy. He had truly found it impossible to tear himself away.

The wound between the brows of the Black Dragon should have slowly gotten better. At least, he couldn't see any problems on the surface.

Chen Changsheng took out the food such as roast lamb and chicken that he had prepared as usual, also cleaning up the trash on the floor. Just as he was prepared to speak, a sudden chilly wind blew into his face.

It was the Black Dragon's dragon breath, containing a frightening might and cold.

The most powerful soul could be dispersed by this icy dragon breath.

The dragon breath of the Golden Dragon could melt metal. Chen Changsheng had never seen it before, but he could be very sure now that its peer the Black Frost Dragon's dragon breath could definitely freeze metal into bits, because he was currently frozen to a halt, the cold piercing into his bones and his body in incomparable pain. After some time, he was finally able to break through the ice with great difficulty. Fear still lingering in his heart, he said, "In the future, don't joke around like this anymore."

He didn't know that his body had once been bathed in the true blood of the Black Dragon, or else that dragon breath would have simply frozen him to death. Then it would no longer be a joke.

A hint of happiness and content flashed across the Black Dragon's

massive eyes and the cavernous space echoed with the sounds of 'zhizhi' as it laughed.

Chen Changsheng was already used to the strange laughter of the Black Dragon. He told it what had happened recently to the Orthodox Academy, which could also be considered an explanation for his lack of visits.

The Black Dragon slowly descended to the ground before him, blocking out the radiance of the several thousand Night Pearls studding the ceiling of the underground space.

Chen Changsheng stood in its shadow, staring at it for a long time. He firmly resolved that he must get an answer today.

Back then when he had endangered his life and attempted Introspective Meditation for the first time, he was just about to die, but when he finally woke up, he was lying on his bed in the Orthodox Academy, and he wasn't even wounded. On the contrary, he had obtained an unimaginably tough body, strength and speed.

He knew that this was definitely related to the Black Dragon. Later on, he had asked several times, but the Black Dragon had always avoided answering his question. Hearing his question, or maybe sensing his resolve today, the Black Dragon did not act as it had done before, using disregard to humiliate him, or using its dragon breath to humiliate him. Instead, it fell into a long silence.

"Are you sure you wish to know the answer?" the Black Dragon said in human tongue.

This was not the first time Chen Changsheng had heard the Black Dragon speak in human tongue. During the first time, he had not understood why the Black Dragon's voice was similar to that of an irritable and easily angered young girl. He later on realized that although the Black Dragon had been locked in this underground space by Wang Zhice for several centuries, when relative to the long lives of the Dragon Race, it was truthfully still in its youth. It could not be called a child dragon, but it should be...

A young maiden dragon?

Chen Changsheng replied, "I wish to know the answer."

After another long silence, the Black Dragon described the circumstances back then.

Only then did Chen Changsheng realize that he had originally been so fortunate.

After a long silence, he looked at the Black Dragon and asked, "How should I thank Your Honor?"

After the journey in the Garden of Zhou, he very rarely addressed the Black Dragon respectfully. However, his mindset was somewhat restless, filled with a lingering fear and gratitude to the Black Dragon, so he respectfully addressed it with 'Your Honor'.

Yet the Black Dragon clearly did not wish to hear these words. A

tinge of vexation appeared in the depths of its massive eyes.

And then the Black Dragon thought of something and the vexation turned into anger.

If Chen Changsheng were more sensitive in certain aspects, perhaps he would have been able to see a little shame.

All the meanings in the depths of the Black Dragon's eyes ultimately transformed into a fiendish intent.

You obtained my first blood and then actually asked me how to thank me!

The world of the underground space instantly became incomparably frigid. The mantle of snow on the ground was jolted into the air and snowflakes began to float down from the sky. Everywhere was a dense white.

A dragon cry fell directly in Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness.

It was her voice, this time in dragon tongue.

Her voice was very soft, very clear.

Her emotions were very chilly, very intense.

Chen Changsheng was almost shocked into unconsciousness. When he turned his thoughts to that dragon cry he had just heard, he realized that it was the Black Dragon's words to him.

Dragon language was this world's most complex and also simplest language. A single dragon cry was one syllable, but within it were countless tones. It could mean one thing, or it could be an entire essay.

When Chen Changsheng was small and studying that very last scroll, he had touched upon the Dragon language. After coming to the capital, he had also learned some from the Black Dragon, but he still was not able to completely understand this dragon cry.

He could vaguely understand a few parts of the Black Dragon's cry.

"Blood...you...I...pact...oath...heartless...shame...sin...die...
warehouse...water...fat...next..."

What did this mean? He was somewhat at a loss. The word 'heartless' had especially resonated in his mind, making him doubt if he had really heard it correctly, if he had really been learning the Dragon language.

"Just what does Your Honor want me to do?"

He patted the snow and ice off his body, walked up to the Black Dragon, and raised his head.

The Black Dragon towered over him, a smear of sadness and grievance gradually appearing in its emotionless eyes.

Perhaps because it didn't want Chen Changsheng to see or because it truly was rather tired, it closed its eyes. With this action, the snowstorm in the underground space also ceased.

Chen Changsheng looked at it and said, "Thank you."

He spoke very sincerely, but the Black Dragon did not open its eyes. Just like it had said in the Garden of Zhou and the snowy mountain range, it believed that when he said these two words, he had not been mindful.

In truth, Chen Changsheng had seen the sadness and grievance in the Black Dragon's eyes before it closed them.

He had not connected it to himself, but was rather thinking that if it were exchanged for a human or demi-human, then this Black Dragon would most likely be a young maiden like Luoluo.

If a young maiden were deceived by a human expert and then imprisoned in this underground space for several centuries, they would definitely feel a sense of grievance and sadness.

Chen Changsheng believed he understood why the Black Dragon had displayed such anger a few moments ago.

Yes, the Black Dragon had saved his life, even bestowed upon him a better one. On the other hand, it had been imprisoned in this underground space the entire time. He had once promised it that if possible, he would think of a way to rescue it. But half a year had gone, and what had he done? Had he even thought about this matter? He had even dared to ask just now if there was any way he could thank it...

He lowered his head and walked past the Black Dragon's body, walking off into the darkness until he gradually disappeared.

Chen Changsheng was currently filled with guilt.

The Black Dragon had not opened its eyes, but it knew what he was doing. However, it didn't know what he was thinking.

There was silence, with only the gradually fading sounds of footsteps. The Black Dragon's closed eyes seemed to quiver, ice rustling down. It seemed as if it wished to open its eyes, but it ultimately chose not to.

She somewhat callously thought, humans are truly all shameless and incapable. Upon encountering an unresolvable problem or some unbearable kindness, they will think about avoiding it or else engage in vicious quarrel.

In the end, you are still a human.

Then if you want to leave, leave.

My appetite today is no good, I don't want to eat a human.

But when you come next time and still only dare to say thank you and not even bring the dishes of the Orthodox Academy's cafeteria to let me try, I will definitely swallow you whole.

Yes, when Chen Changsheng had been narrating the recent events of the Orthodox Academy, he had not forgotten to mention that Tang Thirty-Six had made Clear Lake Restaurant into the Orthodox Academy's cafeteria.

When she heard the word 'blue lobster', she recalled how when she was very small and followed her father journeying west for fun, whenever she got bored on their journey on the seabed, she randomly grabbed a few blue lobsters and chewed them as snacks. Later on, when she arrived in the human world, she realized that some of the humans in the south also enjoyed eating similar foods. Apparently, they were called betel nuts?

The Black Dragon abruptly awoke from her trance, thinking, have I been imprisoned too long? How could it be so easy for me to wander off? A moment ago, I was preparing to reprimand heartless youths, so then how did I suddenly start thinking about snacks?

Then she heard from far behind her a pounding noise, causing her to slowly open her eyes.

She was a Black Frost Dragon. The chill within her eyes could cause the entire world to tremble in fear. For some reason, there

was an extra tinge of warmth within them.

The pounding sound came from a distant place. This was because the Black Dragon's body was enormous, like a mountain range.

At the moment, Chen Changsheng was right in front of that absolutely colossal wall, attempting to open up the chains that imprisoned the Black Dragon.

Miraculously, these two chains were not very thick, at least when compared to the Black Dragon's body, yet the Black Dragon was unable to get rid of them.

Chen Changsheng had tried before, so he knew that he even the Stainless Sword assessed by the Pavilion of Divination as being incomparably sharp was incapable of cutting apart these chains.

This was because the edge of the Stainless Sword could not actually touch the chains. The outer surface of the chains was covered in an invisible and untouchable, yet very real, wrapping of Qi.

The pounding coming from the direction of the wall was the sound of him pounding against the thick layer of ice where the chains attached to the wall.

The chains and formations imprisoning the Black Frost Dragon were certainly not something he could currently break, but just as the journey of ten thousand li begins with a single step, he still had

to take that first step.

The first step was research.

The more he researched, the more he was shaken to the core.

Chapter 492 - Once More, I Meet You By The Pool

Chen Changsheng felt shaken to the core because he realized that the chains and the formation within the wall were actually familiar.

He was well-read in the Daoist Canon, and after arriving in the capital and gaining access to no small number of experts of the senior generation, his experiences had broadened even more. His nightly chats with Lady Chujian in the Garden of Zhou, his conversations with Su Li in the wilderness—these two geniuses had taught him much. Yet he still had no means of breaking this formation, not even a clue on how to start. He could only sense the unimaginably immense strength and terrifying killing intent within.

As he struck off the layer of ice and wholeheartedly examined the place where the chains attached to the wall, those two deceased generals carved onto the colossal stone wall also seemed to examine him.

After quite some time had passed, Chen Changsheng raised his head to gaze up at the wall.

As he gazed up at those two legendary Divine Generals, he was filled with shock.

The experts of that time had truly been too powerful.

The first generation of blooming wildflowers in the past one thousand years was presumably that inconceivable. He was extremely sure that whether it was Wang Zhice that had set up this formation or those two Divine Generals who had only left a strand of spiritual sense behind and were still able to hold fast the chains that bound the dragon, all of them had entered the Divine Domain. Then of the twenty-four meritorious ministers of Lingyan Pavilion, how many of them had been in the Saint Realm?

In the era of Taizong, how powerful had the human world been?

No wonder the demons had been so utterly defeated, ultimately being forced back to Xuelao City. Then what about now? Beginning several decades ago when Wang Po emerged from Tianliang, many people believed that the human world was welcoming another generation of blooming wildflowers. He was also amongst their number. Then when would he and the fellow members of this generation finally be able to catch up to those figures of the past?

"Take a rest. With your current cultivation, there's no way you can pull those chains out of the wall."

The Black Dragon's voice resonated through the deathly stillness of the underground space. She spoke in human tongue, so the voice of a young maiden could be heard. It was brimming with ridicule, but it was also relatively content. Yes, she was relatively satisfied with Chen Changsheng's performance today. When compared to the two simple words of 'thank you', the focus he had when researching the formation in the wall and the chains was

intention.

With a gust of cold wind, the Black Dragon's mountainous body swiftly moved through the underground space. How it had done it was a mystery, but in a very short amount of time, its head had arrived in the air in front of Chen Changsheng. It looked down on him from up high, awe-inspiring and deliberately apathetic.

Chen Changsheng examined the complicated designs of unknown meaning on the chains. He shook his head and then looked up at the Black Dragon. "You might have to give me even more time."

The Black Dragon replied, "I just said to you, time isn't important to me at all. The most important thing is the result."

Chen Changsheng thought, just when did you say that? But upon thinking about it a bit more, he realized that the Black Dragon was speaking of that dragon cry. The problem was that he had not been able to understand everything within that dragon cry.

He raised his head and asked the Black Dragon, "Just what did you say a moment ago? What do you want me to do?"

The Black Dragon replied, "When you can understand what that means, you will naturally have an answer."

Chen Changsheng didn't understand why these formidable beings of the Divine Domain always spoke in such a cryptic and incomprehensible manner. The Pope was like this, Zhu Luo was

like this, but now that he thought about, Su Li spoke more like a normal person, even though he clearly wasn't much of a normal person.

He could see that the Black Dragon's mind was set. No matter how he asked, it would not respond. It was just like how in the past, it had refused to tell him what had happened on that night he attempted Meditation for the first time. It was only today that it, for some reason of its own, suddenly decided to say it. Then it could also be said that on this matter of the dragon cry, perhaps in the future when it felt like explaining it, it would naturally explain it...but he was still rather curious.

It was at this point that Chen Changsheng realized that having a good grasp of a language was an incredibly important thing.

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In the eyes of outsiders, and even the official records of the court, this place was an abandoned palace. Only the eunuchs and maids at the Divine Empress's side knew that the Empress would occasionally visit this palace to sit or stroll, but nobody understood why. After a certain summer day last year, the Empress began to visit this palace even more, but the people allowed to remain in the palace with her grew less and less.

Today, this palace contained only herself.

The Divine Empress stood by the water outside the palace, her eyes gazing at the small pool before her and remaining there for a very long time.

From dawn to dusk and then into the night, she reigned over this vast country. She was nominally the master of the entire human world. Every day, she had to handle countless matters of the Imperial Court. Her time was incomparably precious, yet she had spent an entire day staring at this small pool.

At the very beginning, it was because her mind was a little restless after speaking with that old man. To her, this was an extremely rare occurrence, so she wished to stand by this water where no one was and calm herself.

Then it was because she recalled what had occurred several times when she was standing by this pool: meeting with that youth.

Later on, it was because she realized that youth had really come.

At that moment, she had raised her head and glanced at those many stars which had just appeared in the night sky. Her lips perked with a sense of derision, thinking, this thing called fate really is interesting.

She had once changed her own fate. She was the person in the world who would most fearlessly confront fate head-on, so she did not leave, instead waiting for the arrival of fate.

In the darkness, the dark green waters of the pool suddenly began to move. The middle part of the pool bubbled most fiercely as if it was boiling.

She quietly watched that place, allowing the night wind to brush against her.

In Taizong's era, she was already acclaimed throughout the world as one of the great beauties. Not even Zhou Yuren had been able to steal away her splendor.

As she became Empress Consort, she became the supreme beauty of the world in the eyes of many.

When she began to read through the memorials in Emperor Xian's place, manage the affairs of state, and was conferred the title of Divine Empress, no one dared to describe her with the word 'beauty' any longer.

Authority would forever be above beauty.

But this did not change the fact that she truly was very beautiful.

The passage of time had left no marks upon her face. Her so-called serenity, composure, and maturity were merely a matter of temperament. There was nothing that could be fussed over with regards to her appearance. She was extremely beautiful, but perhaps because she had reigned over this world for too long, there was a faintly discernible tinge of divine prestige about her

appearance, as well as an extremely faint strand of fiendish intent.

As the night wind brushed across her face, that beauty and majesty was all washed away, leaving behind a very ordinary appearance. That fiendish intent was still there, but it had been pushed deep into the space between her eyebrows.

The bubbling and sloshing of water from the pool did not cease, nor did the night wind. The wind circled around her body, and the sacred gown signifying her status and identity transformed into an ordinary cloth dress.

With a gentle gust of wind, she became an ordinary woman. Only that ebony hairpin remained stuck into her hair.

With a spray of bubbles, Chen Changsheng emerged from the water.

He swam over to the side of the pool and climbed out. He walked into a thicket and prepared to change out of his soaking clothes for his spare set of clean clothes, but then abruptly realized that something wasn't quite right.

He turned to look across at the other side of the pool and saw her.

Chapter 493 - I Want To Have A Look At Your Face

In the darkness, the palace was cold and cheerless. The pool and the small garden were also very cold and cheerless, even though it was a summer night.

It wasn't just two people by the pool. There was also the Black Goat. It was in the thicket not too far away.

Chen Changsheng first saw the middle-aged woman and then saw the Black Goat. If it were another person, they definitely would have been given quite the fright, but he was not. He had already grown accustomed to seeing the Black Goat every time he emerged from the underground space below New North Bridge. As for the middle-aged woman, he also did not find it strange. The first time he came out of the pool, he had seen her.

Deep within the Forbidden Palace, as if afraid that alarming the people within the palace would cause big trouble, he said nothing. Clasp ing his hands, he bowed towards the middle-aged woman.

His action was very courteous and his movements very proper. It was just that he was still soaked to the bone, so this respectful bow of his couldn't help but look rather comical.

The Black Goat watched him through the leaves, slightly tilting its head as if it was making fun of him.

He couldn't deal with all this. He gestured to the middle-aged woman that he needed to change into a clean set of clothes and wished her to turn around and wait a moment.

Then he used his mouth to say to the Black Goat, "Close your eyes."

He had always believed that the middle-aged woman was deaf and dumb and so could naturally understand the sign language he had learned from Senior Yu Ren. In fact, she really did know sign language.

But she did not turn around because nothing in this world had the qualifications to make her turn around and avert her gaze.

The Black Goat also did not close its eyes. On the contrary, it opened them even wider, two bright spots in the darkness.

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to do. Soaked through and through with water dripping off his body nonstop, he cut quite the pitiful figure.

The middle-aged woman seemed somewhat displeased at his reaction and waved her sleeve.

A gust of wind blew across from her side of the pool and wrapped around his body.

The wind of summer nights wasn't at all dry, but it was rather

hot.

In a moment, his clothes were dry. From the inside out, they were dry and clean beyond compare.

Chen Changsheng was stunned, then he saw the middle-aged woman walk out of the garden, her hands clasped behind her.

The Black Goat glanced at him, then turned its head and walked out of the thicket to catch up to the middle-aged woman.

In the past when he had made his way back to the Orthodox Academy from the Imperial Palace, the Black Goat had always led the way, even later on when he had the key. Habit was always a most powerful thing. Consequently, he followed the Black Goat, accompanying the middle-aged woman into the darkness of the Imperial Palace, then through that secluded secret door arrived at...the Hundred Herb Garden.

Presently, Luoluo was staying in the Li Palace for a month, and then in the Imperial Palace for a month. The Hundred Herb Garden had been deserted for quite some time.

Besides when he came with Tang Thirty-Six to steal medicinal herbs, Chen Changsheng had also not been here in quite some time.

But the Hundred Herb Garden was still the same as ever. Its long hallways were still extremely perplexing. The trees and flowers

were still growing extremely well, half-obscuring the paths. The table in the forest was still at its original place. Still arranged on that stone table were one teapot and two teacups. It was just that today, the tea being drunk was white tea. The tea was very clear, but very fragrant.

There were many things that he found impossible to comprehend, to understand. For instance, why was it that although the Hundred Herb Garden had no people, this stone table had a teapot and teacups—why was the tea freshly brewed and had just reached the perfect temperature, neither too hot nor too cold? For instance, why was it that this Black Goat which he heard Mo Yu had raised in the palace, was so close to this middle-aged woman? For instance, why was it that this middle-aged woman needed only a wave of her sleeve to have the night wind dry his clothes and hair? For instance, this middle-aged woman...just who was she?

This middle-aged woman's cultivation was unfathomable, at least in his eyes. Her status in the Imperial Palace was very high and she could move about as she pleased. Moreover, she knew many of the secrets of the Imperial Palace and seemed to have a peculiar affection for the Hundred Herb Garden—Chen Changsheng had long realized that this middle-aged woman was not simple. He had even speculated as to her identity many times, guessing her to be everything from an imperial concubine once doted upon by Emperor Xian but now fallen from grace to a Daoist nun that had cultivated together with the Divine Empress in the Hundred Herb Garden, but he always felt these guesses to be wrong.

Later on, Chen Changsheng ceased to guess. The middle-aged woman had never asked him to do anything and had even helped

him in passing. In addition, just as Tang Thirty-Six had once said, because of his own reasons, he didn't care very much for many things and would always reveal a composure that surpassed his age. It was also because he had many of his own secrets and didn't wish to seek the secrets of others.

More importantly, he had grown used to, even enjoyed, the mood when he and this middle-aged woman sat across from each other in the Hundred Herb Garden, drinking tea, even though it had only happened three times.

When they were drinking tea in the Hundred Herb Garden, the middle-aged woman would never speak and he was not required to speak. The middle-aged woman would spend the vast majority of the time gazing up at the stars in the night sky or the marks of time in the Hundred Herb Garden. She didn't look at him, so there was no need for him to be nervous. That sort of tranquility seemed able to bring him back to Xining Village's old temple, as if he were sitting with Senior Yu Ren by the stream. Nothing needed to be said, nor did either of them need to know what the other was thinking. They could just sit like this, whiling away the time.

Because of the Garden of Zhou, Chen Changsheng's emotions were rather unsettled recently.

He had no means of entering the Garden of Zhou and so had no means of finally confirming that maiden's tracks. This made him very anxious and he desperately required this moment of tranquility.

Yet this time was different. This sort of tranquility which he

yearned for and treasured was shattered.

The middle-aged woman withdrew her gaze from the starry sky and began to look at him.

This look lasted for a very long time. She looked very carefully, very calmly, very attentively. It was like his face contained mountains, water, flowers, trees, clouds—contained limitless sights.

Chen Changsheng didn't know why she was looking at him. There was an indescribable feeling about it and naturally some tension as well.

As time flowed on, the middle-aged woman continued to examine, making him ever more nervous, so much so that his body began to turn stiff.

At this moment, the middle-aged woman suddenly reached out her hand, using her forefinger to raise his chin.

Chen Changsheng was startled.

The first time they had drunken tea at this place, the middle-aged woman had once caressed his cheeks. Back then, because of the emotions in her eyes, Chen Changsheng had held it in and done nothing.

But caressing a cheek and raising his chin were two actions with

completely different implications. The former could be understood as a senior showing tender affection for a junior, recollecting some sort of lost emotion. As for the latter...it was more like teasing a small animal or flirting. Moreover, although this woman was old enough to be his mother, in the end, they were man and woman. He really couldn't endure this sort of action. He wanted to turn his head and avoid it, but realized that some incomprehensible Qi was being transmitted from that finger and made it impossible for him to move.

She raised his chin and carefully scrutinized his face.

Of course, she was not flirting with a young man, nor was she teasing a small animal. There was no tender affection in her eyes, no sense of nostalgia, no emotion whatsoever.

She examined Chen Changsheng's face like she was looking at a painting, wanting to see what sort of secrets lay hidden behind the painting.

Chen Changsheng found the expression in her eyes deeply unpleasant because it was too apathetic. However, he didn't move an inch. His nose rose up and down, his breathing much coarser than usual.

If it were Luoluo or Tang Thirty-Six seeing this scene, they would know that he was truly angry.

But she did not know, and even if she did know, this would not affect her decision. No man or matter could change her decision.

However, she might have felt that Chen Changsheng's current appearance was very cute. She smiled and prepared to release his chin, but it was at this very moment that her smile vanished. Her complexion became frigid as ice, as if she had seen something on his face.

Chapter 494 - Leftover Tea Shatters The Crimson Gown

A fiendish intent emerged from the depths of the space between her eyebrows.

An incomparably terrifying and oppressive force appeared in the silent Hundred Herb Garden.

Chen Changsheng blankly stared at her face, feeling that fiendish intent emanating from her brow and the sea of oppressive might around him. He subconsciously ceased his struggles, vaguely guessing that something must have occurred.

She was looking at his eyes. Could it be that the problem was within his eyes?

No, the eyes were the window to the soul.

Through his eyes, she was seeing his sea of consciousness.

She couldn't see what he was thinking, but she could keenly sense that spiritual sense which was not at all his own.

This strand of spiritual sense was extremely indistinct, yet extraordinarily tenacious. Moreover, it was extremely cunning, hiding itself in the deepest depths of Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness, quietly sitting on the seabed with those stones

formed from subconscious thought and extraordinarily hard to differentiate from its surroundings. Putting aside Chen Changsheng, if she had not suddenly been taken by the urge to examine Chen Changsheng, to search his face and eyes for something and thus prove or reject her suspicions...if she had not examined with such focus and care, she would also have failed to discover that extremely thin strand of spiritual sense.

"Who is so audacious as to dare move against him?"

As she stared at the spiritual sense in the depths of Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness, she gave a cold snort.

With this cold snort, a strand of her spiritual sense entered Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness. Of course, this was just an extremely tiny portion of her complete spiritual sense. With the strength of her spiritual sense, the moment it entered Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness, it might cause his head to explode.

Even though it was only a tiny portion, the moment her spiritual sense entered, Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness was immediately engulfed in a raging tempest. Countless fierce and mighty waves constantly rose up from the sea and it frothed without end. Even the deepest depths of the sea felt the effects of the storm.

That strand of spiritual sense in Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness had kept itself hidden for a long time, but it finally found it impossible to keep up the act. Accompanied by a mighty surge from the depths of the sea, the entirety of the sea instantly

turned red.

An incredibly terrifying bloody scent inundated the world.

Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness seemed about to become a sea of blood.

In the moment after revealing itself, this concealed strand of spiritual sense was actually so powerful. One could imagine that if it had not been discovered, if the owner of this spiritual sense wished to assassinate Chen Changsheng one day, it would be an incredibly easy affair!

Even now, this strand of spiritual sense was still seeking to kill Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng still knew nothing. His sea of consciousness was already engulfed in countless storms, the blood beneath the fierce storms gradually creeping towards the horizon. But he was aware of none of this. He only felt somewhat absent-minded.

Fortunately, she sat across from him. Ultimately, both Chen Changsheng and that person were her affairs to handle. She would not permit another to lay a hand on him, even if that person acting against Chen Changsheng was that dog she had raised herself.

Yes, the moment that strand of spiritual sense rose up from the seabed, she knew just who had planted it within Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness. That scent of blood was too

distinct, too pungent.

She extended her hand and dipped it into a cup of tea.

In his dazed state, Chen Changsheng felt he had gone back to the past. At that time, she had also dipped her hand in tea to write the word 'ice' on the table, helping him to find New North Bridge and thus the Black Dragon.

But this time, she was not writing a word.

With a flick of her finger, a drop of tea fell in between Chen Changsheng's eyebrows.

With a hiss, the drop of tea turned into a puff of steam and vanished.

Chen Changsheng only felt a buzz in his sea of consciousness and then fainted.

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The instant that drop of tea fell between Chen Changsheng's eyebrows, in that mansion within the principal alley of the Northern Military Department, a cup of tea fell to the ground and shattered.

Zhou Tong's hands stiffened in the air and his complexion turned abnormally pale. It was as if he had caught some serious illness in an extremely brief span of time. Then his fingers began to shudder, his entire body began to shudder. Because of this shuddering, that crimson official's gown began to twist, seeming extremely similar to a sea of blood being swept over by the wind.

Just a moment ago, he had steeped a cup of fine black tea and left it to sit until it reached the appropriate temperature. He had just been ready to bring it up to his mouth and take a sip when an intense pain abruptly running through his sea of consciousness took him by surprise.

That pain was so real that it was like someone had stabbed into the depths of his brain with a rusty knife. Even he found it impossible to bear this sort of pain. His fingers had released, causing the teacup to plummet to the ground.

And it was only he who had interacted with pain for half a lifetime that would be able to sit down on a chair. Although his face was pale and his entire body was shuddering as if he had suffered some terrible illness, he had not fallen unconscious.

The moment that pain bloomed in his sea of consciousness, Zhou Tong knew that something had happened.

That day in the courtyard where crabapples blossomed, he had borrowed the sinister pressure of Zhou Prison and didn't hesitate to consume his heartblood so that he could use a technique to

conceal a strand of spiritual sense in Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness.

The Great Crimson Gown was worthy of being called the strangest of all mental attack techniques. He had managed to commit this deed silently. Neither Chen Changsheng nor Tang Thirty-Six had been able to sense it.

However, even the strongest mental attack ultimately had certain limits. Zhou Tong's Great Crimson Gown could not let him know what was going on in Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness at every moment. It was more like a spy, concealed in the grass behind enemy lines. It would record everything it saw, then when Zhou Tong called it back in the future, he would be able to know everything and everyone Chen Changsheng had met with in the past few days.

Of course, that strand of spiritual sense that was similar to a ranger, on certain special occasions, could also infiltrate the enemy camp and launch a suicidal attack against the general.

This was also a technique Zhou Tong had prepared beforehand. He wished to control Chen Changsheng's life and death with a single thought.

Yet against his expectations, his strand of spiritual sense had actually been discovered and then utterly annihilated!

The annihilation of the spiritual sense had caused a backlash on his sea of consciousness, causing him to suffer extremely harsh

injuries.

Who? Who had been able to discover that strand of spiritual sense he had hidden in the depths of Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness? And just who possessed such divine power to be able to so easily shatter his Great Crimson Gown?

Zhou Tong's complexion was deathly pale and his eyes streaked with blood. Shocked and perplexed, he thought with a chill: could it be the Pope?

There were very few people in the world that could see through the secrets of his Great Crimson Gown. There were only a scant few in the capital, and it was only right that the Pope was among them. It was just that he had specifically made arrangements to hide his technique from the Pope, so how could the Pope have seen through it?

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Chen Changsheng woke up and realized that he had been sleeping on the stone table.

He raised his head and saw that the middle-aged woman had already departed. The teapot and tea cups had also vanished without a trace, as had the Black Goat. The dark forest of the Hundred Herb Garden was still beautiful and secluded, the lively

cries of insects rising up from every direction.

This place was as beautiful as a dreamland, and he felt that he really had just been dreaming a moment ago.

He had not met that middle-aged woman by the pool, not followed her to the Hundred Herb Garden, and had not sat across from her and drunk tea.

He inadvertently rubbed the space between his eyebrows and realized that the spot was a little moist and cold to the touch.

He withdrew his finger and glanced at it, but it was impossible to tell if that moisture really was that drop of tea.

But that moist and cool feeling felt particularly good. Through his brow, it seeped into his mind, making him feel incomparably fresh and cool.

For some reason, he felt much more relaxed, and also much more clear-headed. It was as if something had washed him from the inside out, leaving not a speck of filth behind.

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As he made his way back to the Orthodox Academy from the

Hundred Herb Garden, Chen Changsheng recalled what had just happened. Somewhat uneasy, he began Introspective Meditation under the great banyan tree, yet found nothing strange. His Ethereal Palace, sea of consciousness, and meridians were all as usual. Those severed meridians were still blocked up, his true essence had not been consumed, his spiritual sense was no stronger. But...it seemed that there was now an extra sort of Qi.

If his spiritual sense could once be described as calm as water and heavy as a mountain, it could now be said to have been washed by a spring rain. The surface of the water seemed much more flexible and the mountain seemed to have grown moister.

Was this change brought about by that single drop of tea? Chen Changsheng did not know nor did he understand. He sat by the lake in a stupor for quite some time before finally getting up.

Upon returning to the house, he went as usual to Zhexiu's room. Inserting needles into the neck, sending a light pulse of true essence, helping the medicine spread—these were his methods of treating illnesses.

After so many days of treatment, coupled with the medicines requested from the Li Palace or stolen from the Hundred Herb Garden, Zhexiu's condition had greatly improved. Many days ago, he needed some support to walk a few steps. However, he still spent long hours on the bed, not even turning over unless it was absolutely necessary. Xuanyuan Po had once indicated his confusion over this, but only Chen Changsheng knew the reason for it.

Zhexiu's dark period in Zhou Prison had left far too many wounds on his body. Those wounds seemed to have gradually recovered on the surface, but the pain still remained within his body.

Injury was pain, and the phrase '[pain from injury](#)' was impossible to separate. If Zhexiu moved, he would be afflicted by a horrifying pain, so much so that even this wolf youth famed for his willpower found it better to lie motionlessly on his bed in such a good-for-nothing manner.

('pain from injury' is a single phrase in Chinese, 伤痛. 伤 means injury and 痛 means pain.)

Chen Changsheng knew how much pain Zhexiu was in, so he didn't believe that Zhexiu was a good-for-nothing. On the contrary, every time he saw Zhexiu's expressionless face, he would always sigh in admiration at Zhexiu's ability to endure until now without a single tear.

"After your meridians are repaired, we can invite the priests of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green to come and use the Sacred Light technique."

Chen Changsheng said somewhat consolingly as he removed the needles from Zhexiu's body.

Suddenly, his fingers stopped. At this time, his thumb and forefinger were resting on the final needle in Zhexiu's neck.

He was keenly aware that below this needle was a meridian

important to both human and demi-human, reaching from the Ethereal Palace directly to the lower edge of the sea of consciousness.

When Zhexiu was imprisoned in Zhou Prison, the first Zhou Tong did was use some secret method to sever this meridian and cripple Zhexiu's cultivation.

That meridian was far too important and far too sensitive. Let alone touching it, even gently brushing against it with the spiritual sense would make someone uncomfortable. If it were actually touched, that sort of pain...Chen Changsheng could only imagine it. Of all the people he knew, only Zhexiu had endured it, so whenever he placed a needle here, he would always act with particular care and precaution.

He clearly understood that this particular meridian could not be restored through any outside force, only time. As a result, he had never given a time for Zhexiu's complete recovery and had even mentally prepared himself for the fact that it might require three years, or even longer. Yet, just as he was prepared to remove this needle, he suddenly felt a faint vibration emanating from below the needle.

Chapter 495 - Entering The Garden Of Zhou Again

Although the fluctuation was very weak, it was extremely distinct. It was absolutely the fluctuation of true essence!

What did this mean? This meant that Zhexiu's meridian was already joined. Although it could not be said to have been completely restored, at least true essence could slowly flow through it. Moreover, as long as true essence could flow, the meridian's speed of repair would be countless times faster. Much less three years, it might not even require three days for that meridian to be restored to its original condition!

What's going on here? Chen Changsheng thought in shock as he gazed at Zhexiu.

As they looked each other in the eyes, he knew that Zhexiu had already sensed the meridian's recovery. It had nothing to do with the treatments or medicines. For the meridian to have recovered innumerable times faster than he had estimated could only have been accomplished by Zhexiu. The question was, just how had he done it?

"Pain." Zhexiu stared into his eyes. "Can stimulate vitality. The greater the pain, the more vitality is stimulated. You just need to soberly bear that sort of pain."

Chen Changsheng was incredibly stunned. For quite some time, he couldn't even speak.

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Late at night, the lights of the Orthodox Academy were gradually extinguished, thus allowing the starlight illuminating the Separate Garden to seem even brighter. Chen Changsheng stood at the window, gazing at the silver surface of the lake in silence. If this were any other time, he would have already gone to sleep, but today, he did not. The resolute and strict will Zhexiu was displaying had caused him to vaguely understand something.

He sat cross-legged by the window and began to meditate, entering the sword sheath. Different from before, he did not separate a strand of his spiritual sense and have it enter the sheath, instead having the entirety of his spiritual sense enter. He knew that this was an incredibly dangerous move, that he was about to experience an excruciating pain. In addition, if his spiritual sense were jolted apart by the illusory black monolith, it was highly likely that he would suffer severe injuries.

But he could no longer wait. He had to enter the Garden of Zhou and see.

This sword sheath was called the Vault Sheath and within it lay countless razor-sharp sword intents. Combined, they formed a most dangerous ocean. In the past when he had sent his single strand of spiritual sense through this sword ocean, it would provoke torrential rains and howling winds and bring about

massive waves. Today, he had sent all of his spiritual sense, so one could imagine the response from the ocean of sword intents. Instantly, it began to crazily bellow.

It was very painful, truly very painful. His spiritual sense collided against endless waves the size of mountains or else sank down to the frigid seabed. After some indeterminate amount of time had passed, he finally succeeded in reaching the shore on the other side of the sword ocean and set eyes on that illusory black monolith.

The journey had seemed very simple, but it had actually been dangerous to the extreme. If his spiritual sense had not just been washed by that drop of tea, becoming more flexible in all aspects and possessing a sort of vitality, perhaps it would have been engulfed by this vast body of water midway.

Even though this was the case, there had been several instances en route in which the pain had almost made him give up. However, whenever he was prepared to give up, he recalled Zhexiu and recalled how he had raised up the umbrella of ten thousand swords to support the falling sky atop the Mausoleum of Zhou, making him grit his teeth and endure it.

Tonight, what had arrived at the shore on the other side of the sword ocean was his entire spiritual sense.

From this, one could understand how he arrived at the other shore and stood before the black monolith.

The moment his gaze rested on the surface of the black

monolith's illusion, his spiritual sense also descended upon it.

Last time, his spiritual sense had already been able to dive deeper into the illusory black monolith, but it could not go all the way through. As a result, he had only been able to get a faint picture of what lay behind. This time was also the same. He saw the dusky cliffs of Sunset Valley, the now-ruined Mountainside Whispering Wood, those small lakes which seemed to have dried up, and also that plain.

The plain was utterly lacking in vitality. The green patches of reeds and white frosted grass were like large patches of color, cut apart by gorges that ran through the earth.

Just as he thought that all the monsters had escaped the plain and disappeared to parts unknown, he realized that there was a giant black spot to the northwest. With a thought, he arrived in the sky over that area.

On the plain, there were tens of thousands of monsters slowly making their way to the distant mausoleum.

Their heads were lowered, their breathing rough, their mouths dripping with saliva, the wounds covering their bodies giving off a putrid air. They seemed ready to drop dead at any time.

Suddenly, the black monster tide stopped. A figure like a small mountain slowly stood. It was the Mountain-toppling Fiend gazing up at the sky.

The tens of thousands of monsters followed its gaze upwards. They all sensed that something seemed to be watching them, but they couldn't see anything.

After some time had passed, despair appeared in the monsters' eyes and painful whimpers arose. If there really is a god overlooking us, why don't you come save us? How can you have the heart to unfeelingly watch as we walk into desperate straits?

The monsters did not go mad from despair, because those monsters that had gone mad had already massacred each other several days ago. The remaining monsters were already exhausted to a breaking point. They had already abandoned all hope of survival, only desiring to return to the place where they had resided for many generations and then sink into eternal rest with the master of that mausoleum.

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Chen Changsheng withdrew his gaze and he turned his attention to the surface of the black monolith.

The black monolith's illusion was not one bit different from the real black monolith. It just lacked a body, truly being a complete projection.

He gazed at those complex and incomprehensible lines upon the

monolith's surface, pondering the question of just how he could get past them.

If these lines were to fall on the eyes of ordinary people, they would just be abstruse writings. No matter how they looked at it, they wouldn't be able to understand, let alone distinguish some sort of laws from them. After all, this monolith had always been a [Heavenly Tome](#) Monolith.

(天书 translates to 'Heavenly Tome', but it can also mean 'abstruse/illegible writing'.)

Chen Changsheng had seen many Heavenly Tome Monoliths and was very familiar with the lines on their surface. He knew how he should examine them.

His gaze landed amidst the lines, moving along with them. He felt like he had returned to those days in the Mausoleum of Books, sitting before the monolith huts and sitting under the tree for endless days and nights.

Those lines were the orbits along which the stars moved, the source, or perhaps symbol, of all the changes in fate. He felt like he had returned to those days in the wilderness of Tianliang County, raising his head up to the starry sky.

That was the first day after Su Li had transmitted the Intellectual Sword to him.

He had been keenly aware that his calculation ability was not enough to completely grasp the Intellectual Sword, so he had used

another method.

He had used the method for comprehending the Heavenly Tome Monoliths to use the Intellectual Sword. Even Su Li would probably not have guessed that this sort of thing was possible.

Then now, he had to turn everything around. He wanted to use the Intellectual Sword to unlock the Heavenly Tome Monolith. He did not wish to do as he had done in the Mausoleum of Books, viewing the monoliths to be enlightened in the Dao and comprehend. [He wanted to break it.](#)

(This paragraph plays on the word 解. 解开 means ‘unlock’, 理解 means ‘comprehend’, and 破解 means ‘break’.)

He wished to find a path in these lines on the surface of the black monolith, to find the Divine Kingdom amongst the orbits of the stars, to find the truth amongst the illusory fate...and then use his sword to break through.

After quite a long time had passed, he closed his eyes.

After another span of time had passed, he opened his eyes, and his sword stabbed at the surface of the black monolith.

His spiritual sense was currently within the sheath, his body outside of it.

His sword was in the sheath, but it was not within the sheath.

But the moment he attacked, the Stainless Sword was summoned by his will and came to be gripped in his hand.

The Stainless Sword pierced through the air and fell upon the black monolith. It clearly stabbed at the intersection of countless lines, yet for some reason, when the point fell upon the monolith, it landed on a white space.

There was a pop like a bubble in a pond being popped by some naughty frog.

There was a rumble as the ocean of sword intent behind him curled up into a monstrous wave that reached the heavens.

Before his eyes, the black monolith rapidly lightened and then turned into a pure white.

That was light.

And also the sky.

He drew his gaze back from the sky, lowering his head to look at the plain around. He saw those three mountain ranges in the distance, saw the miserable grass of the wilderness.

With a howl of cold wind, his sleeves were blown around.

This was the Garden of Zhou.

He stood at the place in the Garden of Zhou that was closest to the sky and also the place that was furthest from the ground.

He was standing at the peak of the Mausoleum of Zhou.

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Early morning at the Orthodox Academy had long since ceased being so peaceful and quiet. The Separate Garden was somewhat better. Zhexiu was lying on his bed, recovering from his injuries. Although Tang Thirty-Six was much more diligent than before, it was impossible for him to wake up at five. Xuanyuan Po made his way along the lake from the kitchen on the other side and arrived in front of the house. Looking at a certain window on the second floor of the house, he shouted, "Chen Changsheng, come down and eat."

Previously on the other side of the lake, he had seen very clearly that Chen Changsheng was by the window. From this, he knew that it was already five o'clock. The Orthodox Academy had never required a timekeeping device—Chen Changsheng served that purpose.

There was no response from the window.

Xuanyuan Po waved around the fat blue lobster in his hand,

shouting, "This is really tasty when taken with chili oil and flour mantou. I left one especially for you. Hurry on down, or else Tang Thirty-Six will hear and come steal it from us."

There was still no answer.

Xuanyuan Po felt somewhat bewildered. Clomp, clomp, clomp, clomp, he made his way upstairs. Pushing open the door to Chen Changsheng's room, he said, "Brushing teeth shouldn't take this long."

There was no reply because there was no one in the room. The window was open, the morning breeze gusting in and lifting up a corner of the bedsheets.

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Chen Changsheng looked at the Stainless Sword in his right hand, confirming that the sword was real.

Then he confirmed that he himself was real.

This signified that he really had entered the Garden of Zhou. In other words, he had re-discovered the Garden of Zhou.

That illusion of the black monolith now seemed like the path to

the Garden of Zhou. As for the black monolith's original body, it should be the key to the Garden of Zhou.

He clearly remembered that when he was leaving the Garden of Zhou, the sky had been collapsing.

Of the miniature worlds discovered by humans, the Garden of Zhou was the most stable and also the largest. Ultimately, however, it was still a shard of space and could not possibly be as firm as its source world. So whether it was him or Zhu Luo and Mei Lisha outside Hanqiu City, they had all believed that the Garden of Zhou had definitely been annihilated. No one had imagined that the Garden of Zhou still existed. It had managed to re-establish its laws and then, truly and with great difficulty, stabilized itself once more.

.....But a big change had already occurred.

It truly had not been too long since he departed from the Garden of Zhou. It had definitely not even been half a year, but the Garden of Zhou was already incredibly different.

This world had become much more overgrown, much more ruined, perhaps a result of that catastrophe in which the heavens and earth were overturned. The ground was covered in cracks and the water in the sea of grass had grown turbid. In the distant mountains, signs of landslides could be seen. The mountain springs had dried, as had many of the small lakes. The earth was a picture of desolation, and the green trees were caked with dust. The entire sight was extremely miserable.

The cries of insects could no longer be heard from the sea of grass, and the grass itself was on the verge of dying. There were naturally no shoals of fish, but if one looked closely, one could spot a few fish with their bellies up, weakly spitting out a few bubbles.

Even that sun in the sky, that disk of light, had grown somewhat dim.

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Chapter 496 - No One Is Within

This place was the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, and its sun had always been somewhat different. In addition, the fact that the sun had grown much dimmer was not a problem with the sun itself but rather that the space in which it existed had some problem that was incredibly difficult to describe in words.

Being difficult to describe, it was naturally even more difficult to understand. Yet for some reason, Chen Changsheng only needed to glance around to understand why the Garden of Zhou had transformed into this state.

The Garden of Zhou's gradual transformation into a wasteland definitely had something to do with the disaster caused by the shattering of its laws. However, the reason the Garden of Zhou had not been able to repair itself after the reestablishment of its laws was that it had been cut off from its original world. Yes, the Garden of Zhou was a miniature world, a fragment floating in the river of space and time, but it by necessity had some connection to the source world, or else, after the death of Zhou Dufu, it would no longer have complied by set rules and appeared in the world.

Chen Changsheng knew why the Garden of Zhou had to appear every ten years: it needed to connect with the source world.

Only with running water could there be no decay.

Although the Garden of Zhou was vast, if it was truly cut off from the world and became a stagnant pool of water, then even if this

pool of water were as vast as the ocean, it would still eventually turn dead and lifeless.

Standing at the peak of the Mausoleum of Zhou, Chen Changsheng looked all around him and faintly perceived a sort of connection. He judged that with his arrival, a connection had been reestablished between the Garden of Zhou and the source world. This situation should change, but it would inevitably be a very long and slow process. He didn't know if those beings living within this world could endure until that day.

The monster tide in the sea of grass was no longer as vast as it was in the past. Although several tens of thousands seemed quite a lot, it seemed very little amongst the boundless and vast sea of grass.

The tens of thousands of monsters continued their journey towards the Mausoleum of Zhou, planning there to welcome the conclusion of their lives. But in the next moment, they once more felt that Qi, the sense that something was looking down on them. This time, the feeling did not come from the distant sky, but from the Mausoleum of Zhou up ahead. Moreover, this Qi was much more intense. Some of the more intelligent monsters could even tell that they had smelled this Qi before.

The Mountain-toppling Fiend stopped and raised its several-dozen-zhang body high. It gazed at the distant mausoleum, its bean-like eyes slowly filling up with a ruthless aura.

With a whoosh, the heavily injured Earth Monkey popped up from somewhere. Grabbing onto the Mountain-toppling Fiend's

fur, it climbed up to its shoulder like a flash of lightning relying on only its two hands. Staring at the distant Mausoleum of Zhou, it sent out a mournful howl, brimming with anger, resentment, and despair.

At the very back of the monster tide, the Monster Bull had its eyes closed. The remnants of its ears shivered in the cold wind. From the howl of the Earth Monkey, it could confirm the origins of that Qi. Its body could barely restrain its shuddering. The mottled surface of its skin, unsightly because it had lost too many of its arrow hairs, began to send off ripple after ripple. It was like a swamp from which the water had completely evaporated but was still somewhat moist.

In the battle of the Sword Pool, these three great monsters had suffered devastating wounds. Ultimately, however, they were so incomparably powerful and fierce that by some fluke, they had actually managed to survive that disaster. It was a matter of course that they could recognize that this Qi came from that human youth, the main culprit behind the Garden of Zhou's current appearance.

To these monsters, the Garden of Zhou was their homeland. They had calmly lived out countless years here, but then it was all disturbed by these repulsive humans and demons, even forcing them into these desperate straits. The sky had fallen, and the humans and demons had all left, but they still had to live in this plain. What could they do?

The hatred these monsters held towards Chen Changsheng was naturally very easy to understand.

However, for some reason, in the next moment, the harsh howls of the Earth Monkey came to a sudden stop. It stared with round eyes at the Mausoleum of Zhou, a profound sense of disbelief appearing in its eyes, soon followed by fear and cowardice. It noiselessly approached the Mountain-toppling Fiend's ear and mumbled a few words, then took its half-ruined body and hid it behind the horn at the crown of the Mountain-toppling Fiend's head, not daring to peek out its head again. The Monster Bull at the back of the monster tide also calmed down. It slightly tilted its head and then gave out long and low cry.

The Mountain-toppling Fiend gazed at the Mausoleum of Zhou. After a moment of silence, it kneeled on the ground.

Hence, the tens of thousands of monsters all bent their forelegs or lowered their heads. Closing their eyes brimming with brutality and exhaustion, they kneeled.

This was both acknowledgment of their allegiance and a welcome. Acknowledgment so that new people could be brought into the Garden of Zhou and welcoming the new master of the Garden of Zhou.

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At some place in the sea of grass, Chen Changsheng looked at the two great monsters kneeling before him, not knowing how to

respond.

Even when kneeling, the Mountain-toppling Fiend was still like a mountain, as was the Monster Bull. Compared to them, he seemed exceptionally tiny. If he had not met the Black Dragon under New North Bridge so many times and been in an identical position so many times, then even if he was fully aware of the situation in the Garden of Zhou, he might have already rushed to escape. Back then when he and she were in the sea of grass, they had encountered many dangers. In the end, they were encircled by the monster tide. Those two...no, three incomparably powerful and abnormally sinister and terrifying monsters had once given them countless difficulties. If the Sword Pool had not reappeared before the world, then the unity of the souls of Nanke and the young Golden-winged Great Peng would not have been required. Those three monsters would have effortlessly slain and eaten them.

"I know of the Garden of Zhou's current situation."

Chen Changsheng looked at the pair of eyes hidden in the shadow of the Mountain-toppling Fiend's horn and knew that they belonged to that most sinister Earth Monkey. "I can help you resolve a few problems."

Hearing this, the Mountain-toppling Fiend kneeled even lower and the Monster Bull made itself even humbler. The dense mass of monsters behind these two were even more unbearable. The dragon serpents rolled their bodies around while the demon vultures gave out sharp and ugly cries. The monsters used every method to display their obedience and meekness.

In reality, any monster that could live up until now was certainly not a kind one. They were all the most powerful and dangerous monsters. Seeing this sight, Chen Changsheng couldn't help but feel somewhat strange.

He took out all the medicines that he usually kept with him and threw them before the Mountain-toppling Fiend and Monster Bull. He once more turned to that pair of eyes in the shadow of the Mountain-toppling Fiend's horn and said, "Let the heavily injured eat first."

The pair of eyes seemed to dart around, seeming to think about something.

"I didn't bring enough medicine, so you must divide them according to the instructions I just gave you." He no longer looked at that pair of eyes, instead saying to the Mountain-toppling Fiend, "I have an urgent matter to get to. Tomorrow, I will come in at the same time, but if I discover that someone hasn't listened to my instructions, I will no longer come in."

Upon hearing these words, the Mountain-toppling Fiend lightly placed its two thick arms on the ground, indicating that it would do as he said. Its two palms covered in black fur were opened upwards, seeming just like two black forests.

With this action, his horn also reached the ground.

Because of the Earth Monkey's ruined body, it could not stand firmly. It rolled off the Mountain-toppling Fiend, rolling all the

way until it landed in front of Chen Changsheng.

It was plainly obvious that the Mountain-toppling Fiend had done this on purpose.

The Earth Monkey simply didn't dare to raise its head. It incessantly kissed the muddy ground before Chen Changsheng's boots, simultaneously weeping and sobbing. All in all, it seemed particularly pitiful.

Chen Changsheng knew that it was acting, but he did not care. Shaking his head, he headed towards the outskirts of the plain.

He was keenly aware that none of these monsters was kind. This especially loyal and sincere appearance of theirs could not be counted on. In truth, they were all extremely savage and cruel, but he still wanted to help them.

The heavens had the virtue of cherishing life, and he cherished life more than anyone else.

He was also not worried about the monsters biting back after being saved and returning to their former strength. He was the master of the Garden of Zhou, after all. If he did not open the Garden of Zhou, then this miniature world would eventually fade away, and no matter how strong the beings within it were, they would only be able to walk the path of death. To say it another way, the Garden of Zhou was currently his ranch and those monsters were his livestock. If the livestock were sick or hungry, it was only right that, as their owner, he be concerned about them.

This wasn't even considering monsters like the Monster Bull that already possessed a tentative intelligence. He found it impossible to regard them as livestock, nor did he wish to see them die.

Moreover, to him, the Garden of Zhou possessed a deep significance.

He did not wish for the Garden of Zhou to become a land of the dead.

He hoped for the Garden of Zhou to continue to live, just like he hoped that she continued to live.

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The old laws of the Garden of Zhou had already been shattered, and the spatial barrier around the Plains of the Unsetting Sun had also disappeared.

As the new master of the Garden of Zhou, a portion of the new laws of the Garden of Zhou, through some incomprehensible means, entered his mind. Afterwards, he grasped the laws in this portion that he could comprehend with his current level of cultivation. As his cultivation incessantly improved, this miniature world would display even more laws to him. From the other way, his comprehension of these laws was also extremely helpful in improving his cultivation. Because of his grasp over these laws, he

only needed a brief amount of time to walk out of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, cross several mountains, and arrive at that residence at the edge of the Garden of Zhou.

This place was the Mountainside Whispering Wood, the garden where most of the human cultivators had congregated back then and also the place he had seen the Great Peng fly her towards.

The winding corridors and small pavilions of the past were now shattered walls and piles of rubble. The place was pervaded by a lifeless atmosphere. No frogs croaked, but the cries of birds could be heard from far away, proof that this place was not truly a dead country.

But many people had already died in this place.

The collapsing cliffs had buried the most beautiful buildings of the Mountainside Whispering Wood. Countless monstrous boulders were piled up from the depressions of the mountain up to its waist.

At this horrifying scene, Chen Changsheng could only remain silent.

He was incapable of moving these boulders, but he could clearly sense that beneath this collapsed cliff were many dead people.

He stood in front of this collapsed cliff for a very long time, then left.

Afterwards, he went to the other two gardens but gained nothing.

He went to that stream, going upstream towards that cold pool.

There was no longer any sword intent in that pool, nor any person.

The lake on the other side of the pool was also devoid of people. In the depths of the lake, he could faintly make out the light emitted by that Night Pearl.

Chen Changsheng did not remove those treasures, or the silver, or those books that had been immersed in water for so many days and yet had not rotted away. He only took a few things that had been wrapped in cloth.

There was no one at the lake shore. The sands were still stained with blackened blood. He didn't know which was Qi Jian's and which was Zhexiu's.

Then he swam to the depths of the lake, arriving at those small lakes in front of Sunset Valley.

The water in these small lakes had already drained through the cracks in the ground to someplace else, leaving only the dry lakebeds behind.

Back then, he had burst out of the lake here and been rescued by her.

This place also had no people.

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Chapter 497 - A String Of Stone Pearls

Chen Changsheng walked through the wetlands on the outskirts of the plain. He glimpsed that island of reeds and then went to that cave. In the depths of that cave, he saw the bones of that elder from the Setting Sun Sect, already picked clean by the monsters.

Then he went to Sunset Valley, slowly making his way along the mountain path of white stone, arriving by a wutong tree.

He didn't know he wanted to come to this wutong tree, he had just been following a feeling.

But this place also had no people.

There was no other person in the Garden of Zhou.

Not a single one.

Ultimately, he returned to the front of the Mausoleum of Zhou. The colossal mausoleum stood between heaven and earth, still insufferably arrogant as ever. The Heavenly Tome Monoliths arranged around the mausoleum were no longer as berserk and terrifying as they had been on that day and now seemed extremely calm. The lines on their surface, perhaps because the sand blown by the wind over these past days had filled them up or because they had been grinded away, had already disappeared, as if they had returned to their initial forms as stone pillars.

The black monolith was just like the rest, its surface smooth.

Chen Changsheng placed his hand on its surface. From the plain behind him, a burst of low howls came from the distance.

This was a sending off and also an expression of unease and imploration.

They were sending off the Garden of Zhou's new owner, uneasy that he might not come back, imploring him that in his grace, he might descend once more as quickly as possible.

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There was darkness, and then light.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes. He realized that he was still in his room, still by his window. Nothing had changed from before.

It was just that the time had already reached high noon. The sun hung up high in the azure sky. No matter how hard the trees of the Orthodox Academy worked to provide shade, it was impossible for them to prevent the descent of those scorching rays of light.

The light that he saw was sunlight.

Then he noticed that a string of stone pearls had appeared on his wrist.

In every aspect, these pearls seemed to have been made from the most ordinary stone. Their surfaces were unadorned, and they emitted no Qi. Moreover, their surfaces could not even be described as particularly smooth.

He didn't know that when he was confronting Zhu Luo's attack in Xunyang City, this string of stone pearls had appeared on his wrist.

These stone pearls were the Heavenly Tome Monoliths transformed.

Because there were eleven pearls in all, ten of them gray and one of them black.

In the past, Zhou Dufu might have taken away twelve Heavenly Tome Monoliths from the Mausoleum of Books. Later on, when he and she saw them in the Mausoleum of Zhou, there were only ten monoliths and one broken monolith base.

It was precisely because one Heavenly Tome Monolith was missing, and he had taken away the Sword Pool that had served as substitute for this Heavenly Tome Monolith, that a problem had occurred with the formation around the Mausoleum of Zhou. It was only at that point that he realized he had a black stone with him.

That black stone he had obtained from Lingyan Pavilion was actually also a Heavenly Tome Monolith.

That black stone that had come from Wang Zhice had transformed into a Heavenly Tome Monolith, allowing the formation of Heavenly Tome Monoliths around the Mausoleum of Zhou to restabilize. He had originally thought that this black stone was a Heavenly Tome Monolith that Wang Zhice had carried out of the Garden of Zhou, but later on after leaving the Garden of Zhou and recalling the contents of the notebook he had found in Lingyan Pavilion, he felt that his conjectures might not have been accurate.

Regardless of where those two Heavenly Tome Monoliths had gone, the string of stone pearls on his wrist were Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

Of course, it wasn't merely because of these eleven stone pearls, ten were gray and one was black, just so happening to conform to the number of Heavenly Tome Monoliths around the Mausoleum of Zhou. He felt this way mainly because he could sense something from that black stone.

He could clearly sense that the Garden of Zhou was within the black stone.

This sentence was not completely correct. It would be better to say that the black stone was the new gate to the Garden of Zhou and the key to open the Garden of Zhou was his spiritual sense.

He subconsciously raised his hand, taking advantage of the

sunlight outside the window to carefully examine the string of stone pearls.

Bright rays of light peeked through the chinks of the stone pearls, fluctuating between all sorts of angles. In certain tiny places, there seemed to be rainbows within.

It was only at this point that he finally realized what had occurred.

Those objects of incomparable divinity, the source of all Daos, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, were currently being worn on his hand.

And there were eleven of them.

The sunlight illuminated the stone pearls and shot into his eyes, dazzling him and giving a dreamlike impression.

At this moment, the door to his room was pushed open.

He turned his head and saw Tang Thirty-Six and Xuanyuan Po.

"Just where did that idiot go?"

"How would I know...Princess Teacher Luoluo even wanted to me to keep an eye on him, but then he went and ran off without even saying anything. How can I keep an eye on him?"

Xuanyuan Po said with great chagrin, then he and Tang Thirty-Six saw Chen Changsheng's figure.

After a moment of silence, Tang Thirty-Six patted his stomach. With a little fear still lingering in his voice, he said, "It's fine, it's fine. I won't ask you where you've been. As long as you didn't run away, it's fine."

Puzzled, Chen Changsheng asked, "Why would I run away?"

"You just up and disappeared for half a day..."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and said, "We all suspected that upon hearing that Xu Yourong was coming back, you got scared that your fiancée would beat your face into a swollen mess and so ran away."

Xuanyuan Po waved his hands around, saying, "I didn't say it like that."

Tang Thirty-Six sneered at him, "Do you dare say that you weren't thinking about it?"

Xuanyuan Po was a very honest bear child. Hearing this question, he hesitated for quite some time before finally saying nothing.

Chen Changsheng was a little taken aback. "Your mentioning her

just reminded me of something. Can one of you help me write a letter to the Divine General of the East's estate?"

Tang Thirty-Six asked in shock, "A son-in-law with muddy feet moving into the house of his wife? The woman hasn't even come back, there's no need to be in such a rush."

Chen Changsheng shook his head, saying, "I plan to pay a visit tonight. There are some matters I wish to discuss."

"You can't really be afraid of Xu Yourong and planning to do some dirty tricks, are you?"

Tang Thirty-Six was interested now, saying, "You should first ask me about these things. You know that I'm most skilled at them."

Chen Changsheng laughed, but paid no attention to his words. He made his way out of the room, saying, "I'll go eat first."

A few days ago, Luoluo had said to him that it was certain that the girl had not left the Garden of Zhou alive. He said to her that he would go to the Divine General of the East's estate to end the engagement. He had promised her this back in the Garden of Zhou. Even if she was no longer here, he would assuredly still carry out this promise. He had not gone to the Divine General of the East's estate in the last few days because he had been rather busy, because he had lost an important and necessary item in the Garden of Zhou. At the same time, it was also because his heart still held one final thread of hope.

If she did not leave the Garden of Zhou, then perhaps she was still there. Since the Garden of Zhou had not been destroyed, she might still be alive.

Only last night and this morning, when he finally entered the Garden of Zhou once more, did he discover that there was no one within. No person was there, that person was not there. As a result, his final hope was also not there.

As he had searched, he had retrieved that item in passing.

As he watched Chen Changsheng's back go through the door, Tang Thirty-Six fell silent. Finally, he asked, "Do you think that he's a bit stranger today?"

Xuanyuan Po asked in confusion, "How is he strange?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "His laugh was rather strange...very ugly."

Xuanyuan Po recalled the scene, then nodded, "Yeah, he laughed like he was crying."

Chapter 498 - Yesterday Once More At The Xu Estate

If the twilight wished to set aflame all the clouds on the horizon, it would still require a very long time, but the feasts and banquets in the restaurants and brothels of the capital had already begun.

Formal banquets always required long periods of time, so they would naturally start very early. It had nothing to do with conserving lantern oil or candles. The cultivating experts and high officials, the scholars and literati, the young ladies and their maids—what they all valued was the change in light as dawn proceeded to dusk and then into the night as well as the change in ambience and experience with it.

Chen Changsheng didn't understand these things. In his view, if a meal exceeded a quarter hour, then it was unhealthy, just like how all the fine delicacies arrayed before him right now were unhealthy.

Today, the dinner being held at the Xu Estate was different from the ordinary family dinner held last time. This was a formal banquet. Although there was only one guest, a member of the junior generation who was still rather young, the central gate of the Divine General of the East's estate, which rarely opened twice in a year, was opened. All manner of exotic dishes, made with the most precious ingredients, were served, then before they were much eaten, just barely given one or two glances, they were whisked away to be replaced with the next round of dishes.

As far as the eye could see were precious utensils and porcelain

dishes, making him very naturally recall what Madam Xu had said to him on his first day in the capital. Servant girls were everywhere. Without him needing to do anything, a person would naturally appear to attend him. Yet what was interesting was that neither Madam Xu, Nanny Hua, nor that maid Shuang'er appeared today.

Perhaps it was because of what had occurred between them and Chen Changsheng in the past.

Only Xu Shiji was there to entertain the guest.

Chen Changsheng did not drink wine. Out of courtesy, he ate a few dishes, very quickly getting full.

Xu Shiji placed down his wine cup and waved his hand to indicate that all others should leave. Then he waited for him to speak.

Chen Changsheng did not like to, nor was he skilled at, speaking in a roundabout manner. Seeing from his attitude that Xu Shiji had already mentally prepared himself, he straightforwardly said, "Sir should already know the identity of my teacher."

"On the day that I learned that Daoist Ji was Principal Shang, I was just as shocked as everybody else."

Xu Shiji did not mention how he had spoken for a very long time to the portrait of his father in the ancestral hall. He said indifferently to Chen Changsheng, "Lord Zhou Tong included,

many people wish to use this fact to move against you, but you have no need to worry. The laws of my Great Zhou say nothing about guilt by association. Back when the plot to rebel by the Orthodox Academy was discovered, you weren't even born."

"But Sir is still one of the Divine Empress's most trusted Divine Generals. Why does Sir persist with this engagement?" Chen Changsheng asked.

"Everyone believes that I am unbearably vulgar. For me to be able to have such a daughter must have been from the accumulation of many lifetimes of good fortune...there are probably quite a few people who jeer at me in private."

Xu Shiji looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes, not hiding the cold emotion in his eyes. "As for this engagement, it has brought me boundless humiliation...in the eyes of the world, at the very beginning, my Xu Estate looked down on your poor and pedantic young self and wanted to end the engagement, even applying every sort of pressure and humiliation on you. But later on, upon learning that you had a relationship with His Holiness, we shamelessly bothered you, insisting no matter what that you go through with the marriage. As a result, all the humiliation we placed upon you was returned completely to us. One could even say...that we acted very shamelessly."

The parlor was very quiet. All the servant girls had long since retreated far away.

Xu Shiji continued, "Fortunately, no one believes that my family's Little Rong doesn't deserve you, or else even she would

have become a laughingstock."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself, since you already know that this situation is so unsightly, why do you persist? Last time when I wanted to end the engagement, why did you so obstinately refuse taking back the marriage contract yourself?

"But I don't care, or perhaps you could say that I can endure all these humiliations and jeers." Xu Shiji's eyes suddenly became sharp and he transfixed Chen Changsheng. "Because I am a father and so I must also consider my daughter. The Empress is the sole object of my loyalty, but if I were to work for the sake of my daughter, what wrong have I committed?"

Over these past few days, Chen Changsheng had thought many times over why the Xu Estate had seemed ready to defend this engagement to the death. He had come up with many reasons, but this was one that he had not imagined.

Xu Shiji was doing it for his daughter.

Chen Changsheng should have been somewhat happy and admitted that he was happy, but he was not. He did not believe that Xu Shiji was this sort of person, this sort of father. "I know what you are thinking, what the people of the capital are thinking."

With an expressionless face, Xu Shiji said, "Just like how everyone regarded the Qiushan clan head before the internal strife of Mount Li. But the facts are evidence that all of you thought

wrong.

"Correct, if I persist with this marriage, then in the future if His Holiness were to suffer defeat, the Divine Empress will certainly not permit me to live. But I am very certain that even I were to die, the Empress would still dote upon Little Rong. And if...His Holiness were to win, because of her connection with you, I presume that esteemed elder would not have any bad intentions to Little Rong."

He examined Chen Changsheng's profile, then continued, "When the general trend towards the confluence of the north and south finally succeeds, perhaps the Mount Li Sword Sect might still be able to preserve its edge, and so Qiushan Jun could take his achievements for there and go north, but what status will South Stream Temple continue to hold? If Little Rong cannot marry you, the best ending for her would only be to guard Holy Maiden Peak, but if this marriage were to succeed?

"The Pope and the Holy Maiden: this is the true confluence of north and south.

"No matter if they're a northerner or a southerner, everyone wishes to see this scene.

"What is a general trend? This is a general trend.

"Whether I'm alive or not by that point, my Xu clan will absolutely leave its name upon the annals of history."

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The true confluence of north and south, the general trend, the scene that all people wished to see—for these reasons, this marriage must continue.

Chen Changsheng felt that these words were rather familiar, then he remembered that upon entering the capital, he had often heard similar phrases. That maid called Shuang'er had said it, that nanny had said it, and many people at the Ivy Festival had also said it. Even Tang Thirty-Six said it. It was just that during these times, the name paired with Xu Yourong had not been his.

He was not a person who wished to conceal his true thoughts. Raising his head, he said to Xu Shiji, "Back then, all of you used to talk the same way about Qiushan Jun."

"In my view, if I were looking for a marriage partner, Qiushan is definitely a better choice than you, even in your present state. The problem is that he's already inferior to you."

A better choice and inferior—these were two ideas at odds with each other.

Chen Changsheng thought of the news that had come from Mount Li. Under the sunlight on the main peak of Mount Li, Qiushan Jun had calmly and casually stabbed himself with his

sword, thus resolving this massive conspiracy planned for many years in an understated manner. After a moment of silence, he shook his head, "I'm inferior to him."

Xu Shiji did not comprehend his meaning. "His Holiness is your martial uncle. Based solely on this point, he can never match up to you."

Just as Qiushan Jun had said to his father atop the main peak of Mount Li, the young and the old really could never walk the same path.

Chen Changsheng didn't know that such a thing had been said, but he had a similar feeling. He stood up and prepared to leave, simultaneously taking out the marriage contract and placing it on the table.

His actions were not very solemn, nor could they be considered casual. There was neither pride nor humility. He only took it out then placed it down.

He had already come to this Divine General's estate three times, each time to end the engagement. Perhaps it was for precisely this reason that he was no longer as nervous and awkward as at the very beginning.

Xu Shiji's face also showed no sign of awkwardness. Upon receiving the letter from the Orthodox Academy saying that Chen Changsheng wished to pay a visit, he had already guessed at the purpose of the visit.

"As I said before, if you insist on ending the engagement, stand in front of Little Rong and return it to her."

In the Garden of Zhou, Chen Changsheng truly had intended to do this, but he never had the chance to meet up with Xu Yourong. Then he became somewhat confused. Why was it that both Xu Shiji and Tang Thirty-Six had said similar things, as if they had determined that he only needed to witness Xu Yourong's true appearance to utterly dispel any thoughts of ending the engagement? Even if Xu Yourong was truly as beautiful as a goddess, so what?

He even felt that for other people to regard him as such would be looking down upon him.

"I hear that Young Lady Xu will return to the capital in the few days. I will first leave the marriage contract in Sir's honorable home. If Young Lady Xu has any opinion, please send a letter to the Orthodox Academy."

He paid no attention to Xu Shiji's words, continuing, "I request that Sir not send the marriage contract to the Orthodox Academy again, or else it really might get lost. That would truly be unsightly."

Xu Shiji was infuriated at these words, thinking, you dare to threaten me? But his face showed none of this emotion.

Chen Changsheng was not threatening, but giving sincere advice.

This marriage contract really had almost been lost in the Garden of Zhou.

Back when he had been in the lake bottom, fighting with Nanke's two wings, he had emptied out all the contents of his sword sheath in order to break through the wings of light. Among these items was the marriage contract. However, he had already lost any sort of interest in this marriage and even cared very little for the marriage contract. It was only in the past few days when he had prepared to go to the Xu Estate to the end the engagement that he had remembered this matter.

He had originally planned to say something more to Xu Shiji, but dropped the matter after further contemplation. Without any further words, he bid farewell and departed.

Xu Shiji expressionlessly watched his back fade into the darkness before finally withdrawing his gaze. Turning to the marriage contract, his expression grew somewhat focused. He was rather confused as to why the edge of the marriage contract was rather wet.

Walking through the garden of the Divine General of the East's estate, Chen Changsheng used the light of the lantern carried by the servant girl before him to look at the straight trees and gray rocks which had left some impression on him. He very naturally began to recall those encounters he had at this place.

When he was bidding farewell, he truly had wanted to say something more to Xu Shiji, but he had momentarily been unable to find the right words nor how to form the sentence. If Tang

Thirty-Six were here, he would presumably bluntly ask Xu Shiji: "You're so shameless, does your daughter know?" But it was impossible for him to say these sorts of words. He was just suddenly rather sympathetic for Xu Yourong.

Xu Shiji said that he persisted in this marriage for the sake of his daughter, but everything that came out of his mouth was about the general trend, the confluence of north and south, leaving a name in history, and other such phrases, not in the least concealing his true opinion. Chen Changsheng thought to himself, it's only a fame-seeking individual who would think about bringing honor to one's family, for the persistence of the Xu clan throughout the ages. In your eyes, how is your daughter any different from a memorial gateway?

If thought about in this way, Xu Yourong truly was somewhat pitiful.

As he muddled through his thoughts, he arrived before a stone arch.

A lady stood at the stone arch.

It was very similar to a scene from a year and a half ago.

Chapter 499 - The Li Palace Unties The Bell

That lady was the important maid of the Xu Estate, Shuang'er.

A year and a half had already passed. She seemed much more steady and mature, and her eyes also seemed to have grown somewhat more serene.

Shuang'er gazed past the lantern at the youth...no, he should already be called a young man. For some reason, she felt more and more nervous, her tightly clenched hands becoming sweaty and hot.

She wanted to say something, and she felt that she should say something before her young lady returned to the capital. This was because she had realized that just as her master and the mistress had said, to the young lady, this marriage might really be the best choice. And yet...so many things had happened back then. If it were her, she would definitely still be nursing a grudge.

Just as she grit her teeth and prepared to speak, Chen Changsheng arrived before her. He nodded his head, then continued onwards to the other side of the stone arch.

There was no resentment, no hatred, no head held up in pride nor gnashing of teeth in anger.

It was very calm, like a passerby nodding his head in greeting to some person he had once met at some place and some time.

Shuang'er was stunned.

In this time, Chen Changsheng walked past the stone arch.

Shuang'er turned around, raising her hand as if she wanted to yell at him to stop. In the end, though, she did not.

As she watched his departing figure, she felt a little frustrated.

She found it somewhat puzzling. Why did she feel that not much time had passed, but that youth and this world had changed so much?

Leaving the Divine General of the East's estate, he followed the main road forward until he reached a stone bridge.

It was still that stone bridge. In the scorching summer night, the shores of the river under the bridge were filled with crowds looking to cool off in the shade. There were no fallen leaves in the river water. He stood at the end of the bridge and turned away, looking back at the upturned eaves of the Divine General of the East's estate. He did not speak, not knowing that he and Shuang'er were feeling the same emotion—only a year and a half had passed since he first entered the capital and came here to end the engagement, but why did it seem like a lifetime ago?

Back then, his primary objective for leaving Xining and coming to the capital was to participate in the Grand Examination, obtain

first rank of the first banner, enter Lingyan Pavilion, and search for the secrets to defying the heavens and changing fate. Ending the engagement was just something he could do in passing. Of course, it was also something he had to do. Although he still hadn't managed to find a method to defy the heavens and change fate, it was without question that his fate had already gone through a fierce change. But just why had he still not been able to end this engagement?

He shook his head and crossed the stone bridge, determined to resolve this matter as quickly as possible.

Whoever hangs the bell on the tiger's neck must untie it, and to remove an engagement followed the same principle. The Grand Minister and his wife had long since departed this mortal coil, and his teacher had brought his senior brother along to vanish like a crane amongst the clouds, so he could only look towards the third party involved in this engagement.

He went to the Li Palace.

Without any need for advance notice, the priests standing guard outside the Li Palace reverentially invited him in. They even accompanied him along the interminable Divine Avenue until they reached the palace hall in the deepest depths of the Li Palace.

The Li Palace at night was exceptionally serene, and the palace that the Pope resided in was even more so. When he gazed at the many stars in the section of sky partitioned off by the four walls of black eaves for too long, it really did seem like the opening to a deep and serene well.

At some point, he had removed that string of stone pearls from his wrist.

From the tranquil palace came the sound of gurgling water. He turned, walked in, and bowed to the Pope, that ordinary old man watering the Green Leaf.

"Martial Uncle, just what is the reason for all this?"

In the past, Chen Changsheng very rarely referred to the Pope as 'martial uncle'. It wasn't because he had some sort of phobia of the title, but purely because he wasn't very used to it. However, the many events involving the Orthodox Academy and those plain statements Xu Shiji had declared to him at the Divine General of the East's estate made him realize that no matter how he addressed the Pope, the matters involving him and the Pope were already inseparable in the eyes of the masses. Then it would be better to get used to it ahead of time. He was a person that greatly valued his time. Since he had made his decision, he would carry it out.

Just like how this question had lingered over his mind for a very long time, and now that he could see the Pope, he would definitely ask it straight away.

The address of 'martial uncle' and the question itself somewhat surprised the Pope, then it caused him to chuckle.

Chen Changsheng had asked about the conflict between the new and conservative factions of the Orthodoxy as well as the Li

Palace's silence in the past few months.

"You are all young. Although the matters of young people can't be called trivial, if there is some sort of mistake or some place that is lacking, there will always be some leeway or reason to offset the deficiency."

The Pope returned the wooden ladle to the pool of water. He took the cloth handed over by Chen Changsheng and gently wiped his hands as he said, "But we old ones cannot. Young people can be impulsive and hot-blooded, but we must be cool-headed, even apathetic. In the eyes of all, we are all scheming and calculating, or to put it a bit more nicely, far-sighted and deep planners. Then all our actions are by necessity never acts of impulse. Everything we do must have some hidden scheme behind it, so we only need to move, and the matter very easily becomes much more serious, and now there is no more leeway for error."

These two statements had been rather fragmentary, but Chen Changsheng understood.

This storm had originally been the opening of an assault by the Tianhai clan and the new faction of the Orthodoxy against the Pope, but it had been stopped cold at the gates of the Orthodox Academy. It was only natural that the Li Palace maintain its silence.

The Pope walked back to his chair and indicated that Chen Changsheng should sit. "Besides, this is an opportunity."

These were simpler and even more ambiguous words, but Chen Changsheng still understood.

If the assault of the Tianhai clan and the Orthodoxy's new faction could be limited to a certain extent, then to him and the Orthodox Academy, this was an incredibly valuable opportunity.

Just as his spiritual sense had been washed in that ocean of sword intent and become purer and more tenacious, these battles would enable his sword to grow steadier and stronger.

"Only this way can we have you mature as quickly as possible," the Pope said to him with a kind gaze.

Chen Changsheng only understood a part of this conclusion. After his discussion with Tang Thirty-Six, this was the only point that he could not be certain of. Why had the Pope chosen this method of having him mature? It seemed rather rushed. To use Tang Thirty-Six's words, it was like pulling up the plants by the roots to help them grow.

Seeing his expression, the Pope was rather surprised. "I thought that you wouldn't be that interested in these matters, that you would still need some time to understand, or else have come to find me even earlier."

"There are many things you might lack interest in, but you still have to learn. Since you can't avoid it...this is what Tang Tang said to me," Chen Changsheng replied.

Tang Thirty-Six had said to him, "Since you're going to become the Pope, you have to learn about those seemingly uninteresting things. You have to have your own team, like the Orthodox Academy."

The reason he had been able to understand all of the Pope's previous statements was also because Tang Thirty-Six had done a similar analysis.

Now it seemed that all of Tang Thirty-Six's deductions had been correct.

"You've got a very good friend." The Pope seemed somewhat emotional. "When I became acquainted with his grandfather, we were about your age. It was just that due to a few things later on, I and his grandfather had differing opinions, naturally making it impossible to maintain that friendship. He returned to Wenshui, I entered the Li Palace, and in a flash, so many years have passed."

A few days ago, when he was watching Mo Yu and Tang Thirty-Six converse, Chen Changsheng became aware of the so-called upper layer of society, but he still had not imagined that the Pope and the Old Master of the Tang clan were once so close.

"Since you had not come in the past few days, I thought that you would not be coming for some time. Why did you suddenly come tonight?" the Pope asked.

The Orthodox Academy had already endured through the most difficult period. As it had not asked for the Li Palace's assistance at

that time, there was even less reason to ask for it now.

"I went to the Divine General of the East's estate," Chen Changsheng explained. "I wanted to end the engagement, but that side has always delayed, so I wish to request Martial Uncle's assistance in directly removing this marriage."

The Pope realized that his expression was very serious. With a somewhat strange look, he asked, "Do you know what this marriage signifies?"

In the past, Chen Changsheng would definitely have believed that story his master had told him: Xu Yourong's grandfather represented Emperor Xian in offering sacrifices to the mountains and then was ambushed and heavily wounded by a great general of the demons. Even the imperial physicians were powerless to cure him, but his master Daoist Ji just happened to be passing through the area. With magical hands, the man was cured. In his excitement, the Grand Minister decided this engagement. But now, he naturally was aware that this engagement definitely had some ulterior motive.

After all, his master was not merely Daoist Ji, but also Principal Shang, the Divine Empress's most powerful enemy.

"No matter what this engagement signifies, it has nothing to do with me."

If an ordinary youth said this sort of thing to an elder, their word would often be rich with a childish and laughable feeling,

brimming with a hot-blooded feeling that caused others to cover their noses when it was really nothing but selfishness and presumptuousness. But when these words came from Chen Changsheng's mouth, they had none of these problems. He spoke very calmly and very persuasively. The difference was that an ordinary youth often had no idea what the responsibility meant, while he had very seriously thought it over before confirming that this was not a responsibility he had to bear.

Life and death was his own matter, marriage was his own matter, to have children or not was his own matter, how to raise the child was his own matter. Chen Changsheng had not sorted out these things in his mind, only naturally did things in this manner, or perhaps it was because he had always cultivated the Dao of following his heart, and the previous four points were all the lowest on his heart's demands.

The Pope asked him again, "You will not regret it in the future?"

A profound sensation flashed through those eyes of his that were as vast and boundless as the sea of stars.

Chen Changsheng did not notice. "I will not."

The Pope calmly gazed at him. "Very well."

Before Chen Changsheng took his leave, he asked, "Is it possible to not fight?"

This was naturally speaking about that event anticipated by the people...the battle between him and Xu Yourong. According to the news Tang Thirty-Six had heard, it was said that the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green were already preparing the letter of challenge, the writer apparently a great scholar of the Imperial Court. After his visit today to the Divine General of the East's estate, he grew even more sympathetic for that girl he had still yet to meet. Now that he had received the Pope's approval to end the engagement, he felt that there was even less of a reason to fight this battle.

"We both cultivate the Dao of following the heart. As long as you wish it, of course it's okay. Even if the other side wants it, you can still avoid it."

The Pope raised up the wooden ladle from the pool of water and continued to slowly water the Green Leaf. He slowly spoke, "If you are able to confirm it to yourself, then your choice will truly be according to your heart's desire."

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Pope's back. This time, it could finally be said that he somewhat understood. He knew that these words contained some other profound meaning.

Chapter 500 - I Will Gift You The Best There Is

The distance between the Li Palace and the Imperial Palace was not at all great.

It was just that with Chen Changsheng's current status, to enter the Li Palace was quite easy while entering the Imperial Palace was rather troublesome. This was especially the case given that he had not sent out advance notice. Ultimately, he still managed to startle Xue Xingchuan.

"What business does Principal Chen have in the palace so late at night?"

"I want to go and see Luoluo."

Xue Xingchuan had asked very casually and Chen Changsheng had responded even more casually. Thus, the heavily-guarded Imperial Palace opened its gates.

Chen Changsheng followed a eunuch into the depths of the palace. Only after some time had passed did he come to his senses and grow puzzled as to why he had been so easy-going with Xue Xingchuan. He didn't know that it was because of that time when Xue Xingchuan had stood on the other side of the secret door in the walls of the palace waiting for the Divine Empress's return. At that time, Xue Xingchuan believed that the Divine Empress had gone especially to see this youth.

Similarly, as Xue Xingchuan watched Chen Changsheng's back, he was very confused as to why this youth could be so calm and natural in front of him. He was a Divine General of the Divine Empress, and his younger brother's left arm had been severed by Chen Changsheng's sword in the wilderness. Yet after Chen Changsheng had returned to the capital, they had met several times, yet Chen Changsheng had never showed any sign of wariness, much less apology.

Luoluo's life in the Imperial Palace was rather excellent. Although the walls of the palace still cut off the hustle and bustle of the secular world, when compared to the Green Leaf World, at least this place's sky and sun were all real. She was just rather bored. So when she learned that Chen Changsheng had come to see her, she became very happy. In the quiet garden, the teacher and student talked for a very long time, speaking of nothing but joyous things.

The topics of conversation centered around the great banyan tree and the lake, discussing how the quality of the Orthodox Academy's meals had improved by leaps and bounds, how the amount of food Xuanyuan Po was eating was growing ever more absurd, how the dark circles under Tang Thirty-Six's eyes were getting ever more severe, how unsightly Su Moyu's complexion was upon receiving a letter from his aunt, and how Zhexiu's face was still the same as ever, like that of a dead person.

Chen Changsheng also talked about the ten-odd students amongst the new students of the Orthodox Academy whose talent was relatively exceptional. He talked about how if their luck was good, they should be able to pass the preparatory examination, and

maybe even get into the lower ranks of the three banners of the Grand Examination.

Luoluo was quite happy listening to all of this, but she spoke much less than she had in the past. She spent the majority of the time with her bright eyes wide open, fixed on Chen Changsheng.

Thinking of his encounter with Shuang'er back at the Xu Estate, Chen Changsheng believed it to simply be a natural change in girls as they grew up, so he didn't pay it much regard.

Time swiftly passed as they talked, so much so that the two failed to realize that it was already deep into the night. Finally, Guardian Li, who had been ensconced in a thicket the entire time, felt this all to be somewhat improper and coughed twice. Chen Changsheng recalled his primary purpose for coming to visit Luoluo tonight. Taking her hands, he walked her to the wall and used his own body to obstruct any prying eyes, then felt for a certain object and stuffed it in Luoluo's hands.

Luoluo was rather shocked. Looking at the stone pearl in her palm, she was quite perplexed as to why her teacher had given her this object.

"I'm not certain whether it will be good or bad for your cultivation if I tell you the truth of the matter, so I won't talk about it for the moment, but in short...this is a very good item."

Chen Changsheng stared at her and said, "You absolutely cannot lose it. Whenever you're not busy, you should hold it in your hands

to feel it. It's best to not let anyone else see."

Luoluo solemnly replied, "I absolutely won't lose a present that Teacher has given me."

As Jin Yulu sent Chen Changsheng off, he looked at him as if wanting to say something.

Chen Changsheng was rather puzzled, asking, "Uncle Jin, what's wrong?"

Jin Yulu internally sighed, ultimately deciding to not speak what was on his mind. Instead, he asked, "What were you and Her Highness up to in the corner of the wall?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "It was nothing. I was gifting her a little toy."

In the past, Jin Yulu had firmly refused to take up any official position in White Emperor City, electing instead to farm for a living. However, from the pattern of copper coins woven into his silk gown, one could know his nature. He asked with deep interest, "Is it valuable? Is it something from the Tang clan?"

In his view, Chen Changsheng was incredibly poor. In the past, he had relied completely on Princess Luoluo and Tang Thirty-Six for support, so it was simply impossible for him get his hands on anything good. Thus, the gift was probably something transferred from the Tang clan.

Chen Changsheng shook his head, "It's something I picked up in the past. It's not worth anything."

The moment he heard that it was picked up and wasn't even worth anything, Jin Yulu instantly lost interest, and when he recalled what was going to happen in the future, he couldn't help but get angry.

"Her Highness has given you so many fine things. Have you never thought about repaying?"

Chen Changsheng being the sort of person that he was, it was impossible for him to understand what these words signified. He very earnestly replied, "This item is the best item on my person."

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By the time he returned the Orthodox Academy, it was already very late into the night.

Chen Changsheng would usually have long been asleep by this point, but tonight he was not.

He first went to the Hundred Herb Garden, then to the library, then finally returned to his room.

Standing by the window and gazing at the numerous stars within the lake, he recalled that piece of the night sky partitioned off by four walls of black eaves in the Li Palace.

Going to Lingyan Pavilion had been part of his master's plan, and the box that Wang Zhice had hidden in the wall had also been told to him by his master. However, the mechanism to open the box had never been touched before, indicating that no one else had ever opened it. This signified that his master probably did not know of the contents of Wang Zhice's notebook, nor of the name that Wang Zhice had mentioned within it: Daoist Ji.

Through Wang Zhice's notebook, one could see that Daoist Ji was already exceptionally famous in the era of Taizong, able to enter and exit the Imperial Palace and estates of dukes and ministers as he pleased. So just when had he taken up the office of Principal of the Orthodox Academy, and just how had he been so easily able to switch between these two identities?

Chen Changsheng's gaze rested upon the book by his hand. This book was a record of the major events of the Orthodox Academy. Previously, he had been able to find in this book the date when his master took up the position of Principal of the Orthodox Academy, as well as other major events around that period, yet he still failed to comprehend just how his master had been able to hide his two identities from the world. Crucially, how had he been able to hide it from the Pope? After all, they were fellow disciples. Moreover, it was said that in the coup at the Orthodox Academy, his master had died at the hands of the Pope...was there some ulterior motive in all this?

There were still many things in this entire affair that he found utterly perplexing. For example, the Pope had turned far too suddenly, such that he even broke apart from those pupils that he had personally raised, Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang. But why? He had once asked the Pope, and the answer he had obtained was an exceptionally forceful reason. However, it had not been able to completely dispel his doubts.

Could the livelihood of the common people of the world really affect the choices of Saints?

He thought over this for a long time, but he still could not understand. In addition, this matter involved his master and senior brother, so he couldn't communicate his concerns to Tang Thirty-Six and Luoluo. He somewhat helplessly shook his head, then placed that book in the deepest parts of his bookshelf. Using the starlight spilling down from the night sky, he calmed his heart and steadied his mind. He closed his eyes and began to meditate. His spiritual sense moved and fell upon the black pillar.

The cold wind gusting against him instantly cleared his mind. He appeared in the Garden of Zhou, still standing at the summit of the mausoleum.